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AN OCEAN TRAGEDY

BY

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'A BOOK FOR THE HAMMOCK' 'THE ROMANCE OF
JENNY HARLOWE' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

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AN OCEAN TRAGEDY.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WILFRID'S DELUSION.

It was pleasant to learn next morning that the breeze which had been slipping us nimbly through it since we had trimmed sail for our homeward-bound run had not only blown steadily all night, giving us an average of some seven knots an hour, but had gathered a little increase of weight at sunrise, so that I awoke to as much life in the vessel in the resonant humming from aloft, the quick wash and eager seething of recoiling seas, the straining noises of strong fastenings to the sloping of the spars as though the north-east trades were pouring full upon the starboard bow and we were buzzing through the cool Atlantic parallels within a distance of soundings that would render talk about Southampton and arriving home reasonable.

For my part, ever since we had penetrated these 'doldrums' as they are called I was dreading the long dead calms of the frizzling belt where a catspaw is hailed in God's name and where the roasting eye of the sun sucks out the very blue of the atmosphere till the heavens go down in a brassy dazzle to the ocean confines as though one were shut up in a huge, burnished bell with a white-hot clapper for light. My spirits were good as I sprang out of my bunk and made for the bath-room. It was not only that the fresh wind whistling hot through the open scuttle of my berth caused me to think of home as lying at last fairly over the bow instead of over the stern as it had been for weeks ; the object of this trip, such as it was, had been achieved ; there was nothing more to keep a look-out for ; nothing more to hold one's expectations tautened to cracking point. Everything that was material had happened on the preceding morning, and the toss of the Colonel's body last night over the gangway by lantern light with Lady Monson looking on was like the drop of the black curtain : it was the end of the tragedy ; the orchestra had filed out, the lights were extinguished, and we could now pass into heaven's invigorating air and live again the old easy life of commonplaces.

So ran my thoughts as I emerged from my

berth with a very good appetite and made my way to the sparkling breakfast-table. I seated myself on a couch waiting for Wilfrid and Miss Laura; the stewards hung about ready to serve the meal. I called the head one to me and said, 'Is there any chance of Lady Monson joining us at table, do you know?'

'I think not, sir,' he answered.

'Who attends to her—I mean as regards her meals?'

'Miss Jennings' maid, sir. She told me this morning her ladyship's orders are that a separate tray should be prepared for her for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Her breakfast was taken to her about ten minutes ago.'

'So I may presume,' said I, 'that she finds herself pretty well this morning? And my cousin, steward?'

'I was to tell you, sir,' he answered, 'that Sir Wilfrid will not come to table.'

'How is he?'

'He didn't complain, sir; just said "I'll breakfast in my cabin this morning!"'

'All right,' said I, and the man retired.

There was nothing unusual in Wilfrid breakfasting in his cabin. I was glad to hear that he did not complain; as a rule he was very candid

if in suffering ; owned freely to whatever troubled him however trifling, and made much of it.

In a few minutes Miss Laura came from her berth. Her face had the delicacy of look that in her at all events I took to express a troubled or sleepless night. Her eyelids were a little heavy ; her lips wanted their dewy freshness of hue. Yet no woman, I thought, could ever show sweeter than she as she advanced and took my hand smiling up at me and subtly incensing the atmosphere with a flower-like fragrance that had nothing whatever to do with the scent bottle. I told her that Wilfrid would not breakfast with us, and we seated ourselves.

‘ He is well, I hope ? ’

‘ Oh, I should think so, if I may judge from what the steward tells me. I’ll look in upon him after breakfast. Have you seen Lady Monson this morning ? ’

‘ No,’ she answered, ‘ I sent my maid with a message and the reply was that Lady Monson wishes to be alone.’

‘ Now, Miss Jennings,’ said I, gently but with some emphasis, ‘ you must let nothing that Lady Monson does vex you. You have done your duty ; she is on board this yacht ; I shall grow fretful if I think you intend to waste a single breath of the sweetness of your heart upon the

arid air of Madam Henrietta's desert nature. I dare say you have scarcely closed your eyes all night through thinking about her.'

'About her and other things.'

'Why tease yourself? A sister is a sister only so long as she chooses to act and feel as one. It is indeed a tender word—a sweet relationship. But if a woman coolly cuts all family ties——'

She shook her head, smiling. 'Your views are too hard, Mr. Monson. You would argue of a sister as you would of a wife. We must bear with the shame, the degradation, the wickedness of those we have loved, of those we still love spite of bitter repulse. There is no one, I am sure, would dare kneel down in prayer if it was believed that God's mercy depended upon our own actions. All of us would feel cut off.'

Not all, I thought, looking at her, but I sat silent awhile, feeling rebuked. I was a young man then; I can turn back now, scarred as I am by many years of life's warfare, and see that I was hard, too hard in those thoughtless days of mine; that knowing little or nothing of suffering myself, I knew little or nothing of the deep and wondrous vitality of human sympathy. You find many corridors in human nature when you enter, but sympathy is the only way in; and to miss that door is merely to go on walking round the edifice.

I ate for a little in silence and then said, 'I suppose, as you have seen almost nothing of your sister, you are unable to form an opinion of her state of mind?'

'She is naturally of a cold nature,' she answered; 'dispositions such as hers, I think, do not greatly vary, let what will happen to them. Though one knows not what passion, feeling, emotion may have its fangs buried in such hearts, yet suffering has to pass through too many wraps to find expression.'

I smiled. 'Yes,' said I, 'I know what you mean. She is like a person who lies buried in half-a-dozen coffins; a shell, then lead, then oak and so on. Nothing but the last trumpet could influence the ashes inside.'

'But why did you ask that question, Mr. Monson?'

'Well,' said I, 'you know that we buried the Colonel last night?'

She started. 'I did not know!' she exclaimed.

'Yes,' I continued. 'We slung a couple of lanterns and Finn read the service. Just before the body was launched your sister arrived, rising like a ghost amongst us.'

She looked greatly shocked. 'Was Henrietta really present?' she exclaimed. 'How could

she have known—what could the men have thought of her? What madness of bad taste!’

‘The forefinger follows the thumb,’ said I, ‘and when you come to the little finger you must begin again. All’s one with some people when they make a start. Am I too hard on human nature in saying this?’

But she merely exclaimed, as though talking to herself, ‘How could she be present? How could she be present?’

‘Well, now, mark what follows, Miss Jennings,’ said I; ‘when the body had vanished your sister walked right aft, kneeled upon the grating and in that posture of supplication continued to watch the dark waters for upwards of ten minutes. Meanwhile I was gazing at her from the gangway, where I stood in the dusk fidgeting exceedingly. For what was in my mind? Suppose she should fling herself overboard!’

Her violet eyes rested thoughtfully upon my face. ‘I should not have been afraid,’ she exclaimed with a faint touch of scorn which made wonderfully sapid her voice that was low and colourless.

‘Of course you know your own sister,’ said I. ‘Finn took your view. I mentioned my misgiving, and his long head waggled most pro-saically in the moonlight.’

‘Women who behave as my sister has, Mr. Monson,’ she exclaimed with the gravity of a young philosopher, ‘are too selfish, too cowardly, too much in love with themselves and with life to act as you seem to fear my sister might. They may go mad, and then to be sure there is an end of all reasoning about them; but whilst they have their senses they may be trusted so far as they themselves are concerned. In perfectly sane people many noble qualities go to impulses or resolutions which are deemed rash and impious by persons who falter over the mere telling of such deeds. My sister has not a single noble quality in her. She may poison the lives of others, but she will be extremely careful to preserve her own.’

‘Now if I had said that——’ said I.

‘Oh,’ she answered, with the little colour that had come into her cheeks fading out of them, ‘I will never reproach you for telling the truth.’

After breakfast I went to Wilfrid’s cabin and found him up and dressed, sitting in an easy-chair reading his diary, which I took the book to be. He held the volume close to his face; his legs were crossed, his feet in slippers, his right hand grasped his big meerschaum pipe which was filled with yellow tobacco not yet lighted. The cabin

window was open and the draperies of the handsome little apartment stirred to the pouring of the rich, hot, ocean breeze through the orifice.

‘You look vastly comfortable, Wilf,’ said I. ‘Glad to find you well. But it must be a bit dull here though?’

‘Not at all,’ said he, putting down the book and lighting his pipe. ‘Sit and smoke with me.’

‘Why not on deck?’ I answered, sitting nevertheless. ‘A wide view in hot weather takes the place of a cool atmosphere. The sight is sensible of the heat as well as other organs. It may be cooler down here in reality than it is under the awning above, but these cribbed and confined bulkheads make it very hot to the eye spite of that pleasant gushing of wind there.’

He quietly sucked at his pipe, looking at me through the wreaths of tobacco smoke which went up from his bowl. I lighted a cigar, furtively observing his face as I did so. He was pale: there was nothing novel in that, but I noticed an expression of anxiety in his eyes that was new to me: a look of sane concern as though some difficulty novel and surprising, yet not of a character to strike deep, had befallen him. I glanced at the breakfast tray that was upon the table near which he was seated and easily guessed

by what remained that he had made a good meal. His manner was quiet, even subdued ; no symptoms of the old jerkiness, of the odd probing gestures of head with a thrust of his mind, as it were, into one's face as if his intellect were as short-sighted as his eyes. He was airily clothed in white, a coloured shirt wide open at the collar, and a small silk cap of a jockey pattern was perched upon his head.

‘Has Finn removed the five-guinea piece from the mainmast?’ said he.

‘I don’t know, Wilf.’

‘I must send word to him to take charge of it, and to tell the men that the money will be distributed among them on our arrival. I shall be glad to get home.’

‘And so shall I, upon my word.’

‘The ceaseless motion of the sea,’ he continued, talking quietly and with a more sensible look in his face than I had witnessed in him since the hour of our start, ‘grows so distractingly monotonous after a time, that I can readily believe it affects weak heads. This trip has about exhausted my love of seafaring. I shall sell the “Bride.”’

I nodded.

‘How long should the run home occupy us?’ he asked.

'Let us call it a month, or five weeks at the outside, for everybody's sake,' I answered.

He smoked for a minute in silence with a thoughtful face and then said, 'Five weeks in one's cabin is a long imprisonment.'

I imagined he referred to his wife, and that he was feeling his way in this round-about fashion to talk about her. 'There is no necessity to be imprisoned for five weeks,' said I. 'Your yacht is not an ocean liner full of passengers whose stares and whispers might indeed prove embarrassing. So far as I am concerned I am quite willing to promise very honestly never even to look. Miss Jennings is all tenderness and sweetness and sympathy; there could be nothing to found a plea for seclusion upon in her presence. As to the sailors,' I continued, noticing without comprehending an air of bewilderment that was growing upon his face as I talked, 'Jack meets with so many astonishments in his vocation that surprise and curiosity are almost lost arts with him. The crew will take one long thirsty stare; then turn their quids and give what passes aft no further heed whatever.'

'I don't follow you,' he exclaimed, poising his pipe, with his eyes intently fixed on me; 'what are you talking about?'

‘You were speaking of the tediousness of a five weeks’ imprisonment!’

‘Quite right,’ said he, ‘and tedious it is if it’s to last five weeks.’

‘But, my dear Wilfrid, I was endeavouring to point out that the imprisonment to which you refer is unnecessary; in fact, after last night——’ But here I suddenly bit my lip to the perception that it would be rash and unwise on my part to let him know that his wife had been present at Colonel Hope-Kennedy’s burial. ‘What I mean is,’ I continued, talking rapidly, ‘if it’s a mere question of sensitiveness or pride recoiling from observation, why not imitate the great Mokanna:

“O’er his features hung
The Veil, the Silver Veil which he had flung
In mercy there to hide from human sight
His dazzling brow till men could bear its light.”

In our case we have no dazzling brow and consequently require no silver veils; but in Miss Laura’s wardrobe there should be——’

He was now gaping at me, and cried out, ‘Your brain wanders this morning, Charles. Do you mean that *I* should go veiled?’

‘You!’ I exclaimed; ‘certainly not. I am not talking of you.’

‘But I am talking of myself, though,’ he cried.

I looked at him with amazement. 'You do not mean to say that *you* intend to imprison yourself in this cabin till we get home?'

He shook his head. 'I don't imprison myself,' he answered, 'I am imprisoned.'

'By whom, pray?'

'Can't you see?'

I ran my eyes round the cabin.

'No, no!' he shouted, 'look at *me*. Don't you perceive that I can't get out? How am I to pass through that door?'

'How are you to pass through that door?' I exclaimed; 'why, by walking through it, of course. How else?'

'Ay, and that's just what I can't do,' said he with a melancholy shake of the head.

'But why not, Wilfrid?' I cried, scarcely yet understanding how it was with him.

'Because,' he answered petulantly, looking down himself, then at his arms and legs, 'I am too big.'

I perceived now what had come to him, and felt so dismayed, so grieved, so pained, I may say to the very heart, that for some moments I was unable to speak. However, with a violent effort I pulled myself together, and lighting my cigar afresh in a demonstrative way, for the mere sake of obtaining what concealment I could get out of

my gestures and my puffing of the tobacco clouds, I said, 'Big you always were, Wilfrid ; but never so big—and not *now* so big—as not to be able to pass through that door. See ! let me go first ; put your two hands just above my hips and you'll follow me through as easily as reeving a rope's end through the sheave hole it belongs to.'

I rose, but he waved me off with an almost frantic gesture. 'My God, man !' he shouted, 'what is the use of talking ? I could no more get through that door than I could pass through that porthole.'

'But don't you think we might manage to haul you through ?' said I.

'You'd tear me to pieces,' he answered. 'Sit down, my dear fellow,' he continued, speaking with an almost cheerful note in his voice, 'it is a very grave inconvenience, but it must be met. This cabin is commodious, and with you and Laura to come and keep me company, and with the further solace of my pipe and books, why I shall be very nearly as well off as if I could get on deck. Besides,' he added, lifting his finger and addressing me with that old air of cunning I have again and again referred to, made boyish and pathetic by the quivering of his eyelids and the knowing look his mouth put on, 'even if I was not too much swelled to pass through that

door,' he glanced at it as if it were a living thing that demanded respectful speech from him, 'I should never be able to get through the companion hatch.

'Well,' said I, 'it no doubt is as you say. A little patience and you will find yourself equal, I am sure, to leaving your cabin. If not, and you fear the idea of a squeeze, there is always your carpenter at hand. A few blows dealt at yonder bulkhead would make room for an elephant.'

'Ay, that would be all very well,' said he, 'so far as this cabin is concerned. But would you have me order the carpenter to rip up the deck with leagues of Atlantic weather right ahead of us?'

I feigned to agree. No useful result could possibly follow any sort of reasoning with him whilst this extraordinary fancy possessed his brain. I watched him attentively to remark if he moved or acted as if his hallucination involved physical conditions, as if in short he was sensible of the weight and unwieldiness of excessive growth in his body and limbs: for I remembered the case of a man I once heard of, who, believing himself to have grown enormously corpulent in a single night, acted the part of an immensely fat man by breathing pursily and with labour, by grasping his stomach as though it stood out a

considerable distance ahead of him, and by other samples of behaviour which in his madness he might imagine properly belonged to the obese. But I could detect no conduct of this sort in Wilfrid outside that inspection of himself which I mentioned when he first told me that he had grown too big to quit his cabin.

I changed the subject and sat talking with him for a long half-hour. He asked no questions about his wife, nor as to the disposal of the Colonel's body, nor reverted to the extent of the faintest implication to the incidents of the preceding day. Yet he conversed with perfect rationality; his manners were bland, with something of dignity in them; it seemed indeed as if the poor fellow's craziness had localised itself in this new and astounding fancy of his being unable to squeeze his way through on deck, leaving his mind in all other directions clear and serene; yet mad as was the notion that had now seized him, I could not but secretly feel that there was more madness yet in his insensibility to what had happened, as though indeed the light of memory in him had been extinguished and he was conscious of nothing but what was actually passing before his eyes.

I held my peace on this new and astonishing craze, fancying that at any hour I might find him on deck and his delusion gone. At dinner, how-

ever, that day Miss Laura noticed his absence. My silence, I suppose, convinced her that there was something wrong with him. She questioned me and I told her the truth. Her eyes filled with sadness.

‘He grows worse,’ she said. ‘I fear he will never recover.’

‘This marriage,’ I answered, ‘on top of what was congenital in him, has proved too much. Have you seen your sister to-day?’

‘No.’

‘Does she intend to keep her cabin until we reach England?’

‘I cannot say. She declines to see me.’

‘Yet she has turned you out of your berth, and does not scruple, I suppose, to use everything that you possess. Well, we are a queer little ship, I must say; the husband self-imprisoned by fancy on one side, and a wife self-imprisoned by heaven knows what emotions on the other side; and both doors within kick of a foot from either threshold. It is a picture to encourage an ingenuous mind fired with matrimonial resolutions!’

‘Men are fools to get married!’ she exclaimed piquantly.

‘And women?’ said I.

‘Oh, it is the business of women to make men fools,’ she answered.

Her clear eye rested serenely on mine, and she spoke without archness or sarcasm.

‘I don’t think,’ said I, ‘that women make fools of men, but that it is men who make fools of themselves. Yet this I vow before all the gods: if I had married a woman like your sister and she had served me as she has served her husband, I should wish to be mad as Wilfrid is. He does not ask after her, seems to have utterly forgotten her and the fellow who was sent to his rest yesterday. Oh, how delightful! Why, you hear of women like Lady Monson driving their spouses into hideous courses of life, forcing them to search for oblivion in drink, gambling, and so on until they end as penniless miscreants, as broken-down purple-nosed rogues, and all for love, forsooth! But how is Wilfrid served? Some wild-eyed imagination slips into his brain, turns all the paintings to the wall, and with nimble hands falls to work to garnish the galleries inside his skull with tapestry hangings which engage his mind to the forgetting of all things else.’

‘But, Mr. Monson,’ cried she, ‘surely with some little trouble one might succeed in persuading him, whilst feigning to admit he has increased in size, that he is not too big to pass through his door.’

"Let us pay him a visit," said I.

She at once rose. We had finished dinner some time. I had been chatting with her over such slender dessert as a yacht's stores in those days supplied—figs, nuts, raisins, biscuits, and the like. The westering sun coloured the cabin with a ruby atmosphere amid which the wines on the table glowed in rich contrast with the snow-white damask and the icy sparkle of crystal, whilst red stars trembled in the silver lamps with a soft crimson lustre, flaking, as it seemed, upon the eye out of the mirrors. The humming wind gushed pleasantly through the open skylight and down the hatchway, and set the leaves of the plants dancing and the ferns gracefully nodding. To think of the woman for whom all this show was designed, for whom all these elegancies were heaped together, the mistress indeed of the gallant and beautiful little fabric that was bearing us with a pretty sauciness over this sea of sapphire and under this reddening equinoctial heaven, sulking in her cabin, a disgraced, a degraded, a socially ruined creature, imprisoned by her own hand, and pride acting the part of turnkey to her! But Miss Jennings was making her way to Wilfrid's cabin, and there was no leisure now for moralising.

We entered. The remains of the dinner my

cousin had been served with were still upon his table, and I gathered that he had done exceedingly well. This did not look as though he suspected that eating had anything to do with his sudden astonishing growth. He had emptied one pint bottle of champagne, and another about a quarter full stood at his elbow with a bumper, just poured out apparently, alongside it. He had attired himself in dress clothes again, and sat with an air of state and dignity in his arm-chair, toying with a large cigar not yet lighted.

‘How d’ye do, Laura, my dear? Sit down. Sit, Charles. There is plenty of room for slender people like you.’

I placed a chair for Miss Jennings and vaulted into Wilfrid’s bunk, for though the cabin was roomy in proportion to the burthen of the yacht, the accommodation was by no means ample owing to the furniture that crowded the deck. His high cheek bones were flushed, a sort of glassiness coated his eyes, but this I readily ascribed to the champagne; the interior was hot, and Miss Laura cooled her sweet face with a black fan that hung at her waist. My cousin watched her uneasily as if he feared she would see something in him to divert her.

‘Do you feel now, Wilfrid,’ said I, ‘as if you could get on deck?’

‘Oh, certainly not,’ he answered warmly, ‘I wonder that you should ask such a question. Compare my figure with that door.’

He looked at Miss Laura with a shrug of his shoulders as though he pitied me.

‘Surely, Wilfrid,’ she exclaimed, ‘you could pass through quite easily, and without hurting yourself at all.’

‘Quite easily! Yes, in pieces!’ he cried scornfully. ‘But it is not that you are both blind. Your wish is to humour me. Please do nothing of the sort. What I can see, you can see. Look at this bulk.’ He put down his cigar to grasp his breast with both hands. ‘Look at these,’ he continued, slapping first an arm, then a leg. ‘It is a most fortunate thing that I should have broadened only. Had I increased correspondingly in height, I should not have been able to stand upright in this cabin,’ and he directed a glance at the upper deck or ceiling, whilst a shiver ran through him.

I thought now I would sound his mind in fresh directions, for though whilst his present craze hung strong in him it was not likely he would quit his cabin, yet if his intellect had failed in other ways to the extent I found in this particular hallucination he would certainly have to be watched, not for his own security only, but for

that of all others on board. Why, as you may suppose, his craziness took the wildest and most tragic accentuation when one thought of where one was—in the very heart of the vast Atlantic, a goodly company of us on board, a little ship that was as easily to be made a bonfire of as an empty tar barrel, with gunpowder enough stowed somewhere away down forward to complete in a jiffy the work that the flames might be dallying with.

‘You do not inquire after Lady Monson, Wilfrid,’ said I.

Miss Jennings started and stared at me.

‘Why should I?’ he answered coldly, and deliberately producing his little tinder-box, at which he began to chip. ‘I’ll venture to say she doesn’t inquire after *me*.’

I was astonished by the rationality of this answer and the air of intelligence that accompanied its delivery.

‘No, I fear not,’ said I, much embarrassed. ‘As she only came on board yesterday——’

‘Well?’ he exclaimed, finding that I paused.

‘Oh,’ said I with a bit of a stammer, ‘it just occurred to me you might have forgotten that she was now one of us, journeying home.’

‘Tut, tut!’ said he, waving his hand at me,

but without turning his head. 'Laura, you are looking after her, my dear?'

'My maid sees that she has all she requires,' answered the girl. 'She declines to have anything to say to me—to meet me—to hear of me.'

He nodded his head slowly and gravely at her, and lowering his voice said, 'Can she hear us, do you think?'

'No,' I exclaimed, 'not through the two bulkheads, with the width of passage between.'

He smoked leisurely whilst he kept his eyes thoughtfully bent on Miss Laura. 'My cousin,' said he, addressing her as though I were absent, 'has on more than one occasion said to me, "Suppose you recover your wife, what are you going to do with her?" I have recovered her and now I will tell you my intentions. Laura, you know I adored her.' She inclined her head. 'What term would you apply to a woman,' he proceeded, 'who should abandon a devoted husband that worshipped the ground she walked upon? who should desert the sweetest little infant'—I thought his voice would falter here, but it was as steady as the fixed regard of his eyes—'that ever came from heaven to fill a mother's heart with love? who should forfeit a position of distinction and opulence,—who should stealthily creep like a thief in the night from a home of beauty, of ele-

gance, and of splendour; who should do all this for an end of such depravity that it must be nameless?' his forefinger shot up with a jerk and his eyes glowed under the trembling of the lids. 'What is the term you would apply to such a woman?' he continued, now scowling and with an imperious note in his voice.

I guessed the word that was in his mind and cried, 'Why, mad of course.'

'Mad!' he thundered violently, slapping his knee and breaking into a short, semi-delirious laugh. He leaned forward as though he would take Miss Laura into his strictest confidence, and putting his hand to the side of his mouth he whispered, 'She is mad. We none of us knew it, Laura. My first act then when we reach home will be to confine her. But not a word, mind!' He held his finger to his lips and in that posture slowly leaned back in his chair again, with a face painful with its smile of cunning and triumph.

I saw that the girl was getting scared; so without ado I dropped out of the bunk on to my feet.

'An excellent scheme, Wilfrid,' said I; 'in fact the only thing to be done. But, my dear fellow, d'ye know the atmosphere here is just roasting. I'll take Miss Jennings on deck for a turn, and when I am cooled down a bit I'll look

in upon you for another yarn for half-an-hour before turning in.'

'All right,' he exclaimed. 'Laura looks as if she wants some fresh air. Send one of the stewards to me, will you, as you pass through the cabin? But mind, both of you—hush! Not a word; you understand?'

'Trust us,' said I, and sick at heart I took Miss Laura's hand and led her out of the cabin. As I closed the door she reeled and would have fallen but for the arm I passed round her. I conducted her to a couch and procured a glass of water. The atmosphere here was comparatively cool with the evening air breezing down through the wide skylight, and she quickly recovered.

'It is terrible!' she exclaimed, pressing her fingers to her eyes and shaking her head. 'I should fall crazy myself were I much with him. His sneers, his smiles, his looks, the boyish air of his face too! The thought of his misery, his injury, the irreparable wrong done him—poor Wilf, poor Wilf!' Her tender heart gave way and she wept piteously.

When she was somewhat composed she fetched a hat and accompanied me on deck. The dusk down to the horizon was clear and fine, richly spangled to where the hard black line of the ocean ruled the firmament. On high sailed many

meteors, like flying fish sparking out of the dark velvet ; some of them scoring under the trembling constellations a silver wake that lingered long on the eye and resembled a length of moon-coloured steam slowly settling away before the breath of a soft air. There were many shooting stars, too, without the comet-like grace of the meteoric flights ; sharp, bounding sparkles that made one think of the flashing of muskets levelled at the ocean by visionary hands in the hovering, star-laden gloom. The wind was failing ; the yacht was sailing with erect masts with a rhythmic swinging of the hollows of her canvas to the light weather rolls of the vessel on the tender undulations. It was like the regular breathing of each great white breast. The dew was heavy and cooled the draught as a fountain the atmosphere round about it. A little sleepy noise of purring froth came from the bows. All was hushed along the decks, though as the yacht lifted forward I could make out some figures pacing the forecastle, apparently with naked feet, for no footfall reached the ear.

‘Alas,’ said I, ‘the wind is failing. I dread the stagnation of these waters. I have heard of ships lying becalmed here for two and three months at a stretch ; in all those hideous days of

frying suns and steaming nights scarce traversing twenty leagues.'

'We were becalmed a fortnight on the Line,' said Miss Laura, 'on our passage to England. It seemed a year. Everybody grew quarrelsome, and I believe there was a mutiny amongst the crew.'

'Oh, I hate the dead calm at sea!' I cried. 'Yet I fear we are booked. Look straight up, Miss Jennings, you will behold a very storm of shooting stars. When I was in these waters, but much more west and east than where we now are, I took notice that whenever the sky shed meteors in any abundance a calm followed, and the duration of the stagnant time was in proportion to the abundance of the silver discharge. But who is that standing aft by the wheel there?'

My question was heard and answered. 'It's me—Capt'n Finn, sir.'

'We're in for a calm, I fear, Finn.'

'I fear so, sir,' he answered, slowly coming over to us. 'Great pity though. I was calculating upon the little breeze to-day lasting to draw us out of this here belt. Them shooting stars too ain't wholesome. Some says they signifies wind, and so they may to the norrards, but not down here. Beg pardon, Mr. Monson, but how is Sir

Wilfrid, sir? Han't seen him on deck all day. I hope his honour's pretty well?'

'Come this way, Finn,' said I.

The three of us stepped to the weather rail, somewhat forward, clear of the ears of the helmsman.

'Captain,' said I, 'my cousin's very bad and I desire to talk to you about him.'

'Sorry to hear it, sir,' he answered in a voice of concern; 'the heat's a-trying him, may be.'

'He refuses to leave his cabin,' said I, 'and why, think you? Because he has got it into his head that he has grown too broad to pass through the door or even to squeeze through that hatch there.'

'Gor bless me!' he exclaimed, 'what a notion to take on. And yet it ain't the first time I've heard of such whims. I was once shipmate with a man who believed his nose to be a knife. I've seen him a-trying to cut up tobacco with it. There's no arguing with people when they gets them tempers.'

'But don't you think, Captain Finn,' said Miss Jennings, 'that with some trouble Sir Wilfrid might be coaxed into coming on deck? If he could be induced to pass through his door he would find the hatch easy. Then, when on deck,

confidence would return to him and his crazy notion leave him.'

'Won't he make the heffort, miss?' inquired Finn.

I answered 'No. He says that it would tear him to pieces to be dragged through.'

'Then, sir,' exclaimed the skipper with energy, 'if he says it you may depend upon it he believes it, sir, and if he believes it then I dorn't doubt that physical force by way of getting him out of his cabin would be the most dangerous thing that could be tried. It's all the narves, sir. Them's an arrangement fit to bust a man open by acting upon his imagination. Mr. Monson, sir, I'll tell'ee what once happened to me. I had a fever, and when I recovered, my narves was pretty nigh all gone. I'd cry one moment like a baby, then laugh ready to split my sides over nothen at all. I took on a notion that I might lay wiolent hands on myself if the opportunity offered. It wasn't that I wanted to hurt myself, but that I was afeered I *would*. I recollect being in my little parlour one day. There was a bit of a sideboard agin the wall with a drawer in which my missus kep' the table knives we ate with. The thought of them knives gave me a fright. I wanted to leave the room, but to get to the door I should have to pass the drawer where them knives were,

and I couldn't stir. Your honour, such was the state of my narves that the agony of being dragged past that door would have been as bad as wrenching me in halves. So I got out through the window, and it was a fortnight afore I had the courage to look into that parlour again.'

'My father knew a rich gentleman in Melbourne,' said Miss Jennings, 'who lost his mind. He believed that he had been changed into a cat, and all day long he would sit beside a little crevice in the wainscot of his dining-room waiting for a mouse to appear.'

'But when it comes to imaginations of this kind,' said I, 'one is never to know what is going to follow. Captain Finn, my cousin may mend—I pray God he will do so, and soon——' 'Amen,' quoth Finn in his deepest note. 'Meanwhile,' I continued, 'I am of opinion that he should be watched.'

'You think so, sir?' he exclaimed.

'Why, man, consider where we are. Send your eye into that mighty distance,' I cried, pointing to the black junction of scintillant gloom and the spread of ocean coming to us thence in ink. 'Think of our loneliness here and the condition that a madman's act might reduce us to. That is not all. Lady Monson, this young lady and her

maid, sleep close to his cabin. Who shall conjecture the resolution that may possess a diseased brain on a sudden? Sir Wilfrid must be watched, Finn.'

'I agree with you, sir,' he answered thoughtfully, 'but—but who's to have the ordering of it? 'Tain't for the likes of me, sir——' He paused, then added, 'He's master here, 'ee know, sir.'

'I'll make myself responsible,' I exclaimed; 'the trouble is to have him watched with the delicacy that shall defy the detection of his most suspicious humour should he put his head out of his berth or quit it—which he is not likely to do *yet*. Of course an eye would have to be kept upon him from without. Name me two or three of your trustiest seamen.'

'Why, sir, there's Cutbill, a first-class man; and there's two others, Jonathan Furlong and William Grindling, that you may put your fullest confidence in.'

'Then,' said I, 'I propose that these men should take a spell of keeping a lookout turn and turn about. The stewards would have been fit persons, but they are wanting in muscle. Let the man who keeps watch in the cabin so post himself that he may command the passage where Sir Wilfrid's berth is. You or Crimp, according as your watch comes round, will see that the fellow

below, whoever he may be, keeps awake. Pray attend to this, Finn. I am satisfied that it is a necessary measure.'

'I shall have to tell old Jacob the truth, sir, and the men likewise,' said he, 'and also acquaint the stewards with what's wrong, otherwise they'll be for turning the sailor that's sent below out of the cabin.'

'By all means,' said I. 'I'll stand your lookout whilst you are making the necessary arrangements. But see that you provide your men with some ready and quite reasonable excuse for being in the cabin should Sir Wilfrid chance to come out during the night and find one of his seamen sitting at the table.'

'Ay, ay, sir; that's to be managed with a little thinking,' answered Finn, and forthwith he marched towards the forecabin into the darkness there.

'It is fortunate,' I said to Miss Jennings, 'that I am Wilfrid's cousin. If I were simply a guest on board I question if Finn would do what I want.'

We fell to pacing the deck. Even as we walked the light breeze weakened yet, till here and there you'd catch sight of the gleam of a star in some short fold of black swell running with a burnished brow. The dew to the fluttering of

the canvas aloft fell to the deck with the pattering sound of raindrops.

‘Oh,’ groaned I to Miss Laura, ‘for a pair of paddle-wheels!’

We stepped to the open skylight to observe if aught were stirring below, but gladly recoiled from the gush of hot air there rising with a fiery breath stale with the smell of the dinner table spite of the sweetness put into it by the flowers. Heavens, how my very heart sickened to the slopping sounds of water alongside lifting stagnantly and sulkily, melting out into black ungleaming oil! We seated ourselves under the fanning spread of mainsail, talking of Wilfrid, of his wife, of features of the voyage, until little by little I found myself slowly sliding into a sentimental mood. My companion's sweet face, glimmering tender and placid to the starlight, came very near into courting me into a confession of love. The helmsman was hidden from us, we seemed to be floating alone upon the mighty shadow that stretched around. A sense of inexpressible remoteness was inspired by the trembling of the luminaries and the sharp shooting of the silver meteors as though all the life of this vast hushed universe of gloom were up there, and we had come to a pause upon the very verge of creation, with no other vitality

in the misty confines save what the beating of our two hearts put into them.

On a sudden she started and said, 'See ! there is my sister.'

The figure of Lady Monson rose, pale and veiled, out of the companion hatch. She did not observe us, and approached the part of the deck where we were seated, courted haply by the deeper dye the shadow of the mainsail put into the atmosphere about it. I was struck by the majesty of her gait, by the tragic dignity of her carriage as she advanced, taking the planks with a subtlety of movement that made her form look to glide wraith-like. The sweet heart at my side shrank with so clear a suggestion of alarm in her manner that I took her hand and held it. Lady Monson drew close—so close without seeing us that I believed she was walking in her sleep, but she caught sight of us then and instantly flung with an inexpressible demeanour of temper and aversion to the other side of the deck, which she paced, going afterwards to the rail and overhanging it, motionless as the quarter-boat that hung a little past her.

'She frightens me !' whispered Laura ; 'ought I to join her ? Oh, cruel, cruel, that she should hate me so bitterly for her own acts !'

Why should you join her ? She does not

want you. The heat has driven her on deck, and she wishes to muse and perhaps moralise over the Colonel's grave. Why are you afraid of her?'

'Because I am a coward.'

Just then Finn came along. He went up to Lady Monson and I saw his figure stagger against the starlight when he discovered his mistake. He peered about and then came over to us, breathing hard and polishing his forehead.

'Nigh took the breath out of my body, sir, he exclaimed in a hoarse whisper; 'actually thought it was your honour, so tall she be. Well, I've arranged everything, sir, and a lookout 'll be established soon arter the cabin light's turned down.'

Laura suddenly rose and wished me good-night. I could see that Lady Monson's presence rendered her too uneasy to remain on deck, so I did not press her to stay, though I remember heartily wishing that her ladyship was still on board the 'Liza Robbins.' She continued to hold her stirless posture at the bulwark rail as though she were steadily thinking herself into stone. But for her contemptuous and insolent manner of turning from us, I believe I should have found spirit enough to attempt a conversation with her. It was not until four bells that she rose suddenly from her inclined attitude as though startled by

the clear echoing chimes. Past her the sky was dimly reddening to the moon whose disc still floated below the horizon, and against the delicate, almost dream-like flush, I perceived her toss up her veil and press her hands to her face. She then veiled herself afresh, came to the companion and disappeared. Was it remorse working in her, or grief for her foundered colonel, or some anguish born of the thought of her child? Easier, I thought, to fathom with the sight the mysteries of the ooze of the black, vaporous-looking surface that our keel was scarce now wrinkling than to penetrate the secrets of a heart as dark as hers!

Half-an-hour later I quitted the deck, and as I passed through the cabin nodded to Cutbill, who sat awkwardly and with a highly embarrassed air with his back upon the cabin table, commanding the after cabins—a huge salt, all whisker, wrinkles, and muscle.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DEAD CALM.

I WAS up and about a great deal during the night. It was not only that the heat murdered sleep; there was something so ominous in the profound stillness which fell upon our little ship that the mind found itself weighed down as with a sense of misgiving, a dull, incommunicable dread of approaching calamity. Of the dead calm at sea I was by no means ignorant; in African and West Indian waters I had tasted of the delights of this species of stagnation over and over again. One calm, I remember, came very close to realising Coleridge's description, or rather the description that the poet borrowed from the narrative of old Sir Richard Hawkins preserved in the foxed and faded pages of the Rev. Samuel Purchas. The water looked to be full of wriggling fiery creatures burning in a multitude of colours till the surface of the sea resembled a vast, ghastly prism reflecting the lights of some hellish principality, deep sunk in the dark brine. But I never

recollect the ocean until this night as without some faint heave of swell; yet after the weak draught of air had utterly died out, somewhere about midnight, the yacht slept upon a bosom as stirless as the surface of a summer lake. There was not the lightest movement to awaken an echo in her frame, to run a tremor through her canvas, to nudge the rudder into the dimmest clanking of its tiller chains. The effect of such a hush as this at sea is indescribable. On shore, deep in the country, far distant from all hum of life, the stillness of night is a desired and familiar condition of darkness; it soothes to rest; whatever vexes it is a violence; the sweeping of a gale through hissing and roaring trees, the thunder of wind in the chimney, the lashing of the windows with hail and rain, the red bolt of lightning to whose hue the bedroom glances in blood to the eye of its disturbed occupant; all this brings with it an element of fear, of something unusual, out of keeping, out of nature almost. But at sea it is the other way about. 'Tis the dead calm that is unnatural. It is as though the mighty forces of heaven and ocean had portentously sucked in their breath in anticipation of the shock of conflict, as a warrior fills his lungs to the full and then holds his wind whilst he waits the cry of charge.

I tried to sleep, but could not, and hearing one o'clock struck on the forecastle, dropped out of my bunk for ten minutes of fresh air on deck. Cutbill sat with his back against the table; the small flame of the lamp that hung without the least vibration from the cabin ceiling gleamed in the sweat-drops that coated his face as though oil had been thrown upon him. I said softly, pausing a moment to address him: 'A wonderfully still night, Cutbill.'

'Never remember the like of it, sir,' he answered in a whisper that had a note of strangling in it, with his effort to subdue his natural tempestuous utterance.

'All quiet aft?'

'As a graveyard, sir.'

'In case Sir Wilfrid Monson should look out and see you, what excuse for being here has Captain Finn provided you with?'

'I'm supposed to be watching the barometer, sir. If Sir Wilfrid steps out I'm to seem to be peering hard at that there mercury, then to go on deck as if I'd got something to report.'

'Oh, that'll do, I dare say,' I exclaimed. 'He may wonder, but that must not signify. Heaven grant, Cutbill, that I am unnecessarily nervous; but we're a middling full ship; it is the right sort of night, too, to make one feel the hugeness of

the ocean and the helplessness of sailors when deprived of their little machinery for fighting it ; and what I say is, a misgiving under such circumstances ought to serve us as a conviction—so keep a bright lookout, Cutbill. Nothing is going to happen, I dare say ; but our business is to contrive that nothing *shall* happen.’

The huge fellow lifted his enormous hand very respectfully to his glistening forehead, and I passed on to the deck.

The moon shone brightly and her reflection lay upon the sea like a league-long fallen column of silver, with the ocean going black as liquid pitch to the sides of the resplendent shaft. Not a wrinkle tarnished that prostrate pillar of light : not the most fairy-like undulation of water put an instant’s warping, for the space of a foot, into it. I set the mainmast head by a star and watched it, and the trembling, greenish, lovely point of radiance hung poised as steadfastly on a line with the truck as though it were some little crystal lamp fixed to an iron spike up there.

I spied Jacob Crimp near the wheel, but I had come up to breathe and not to talk. I desired to coax a sleepy humour into me and guessed that that end would be defeated by a chat with the surly little sailor, with whom I rarely exchanged a few sentences without finding

myself drifting into an argument. So I lay over the rail striving to cool my hot face with the breath off the surface of the black profound that lay like a sheet of dark, ungleaming mirror beneath. On a sudden I heard a great sigh out in the gloom. It was as though some slumbering giant had fetched a long, deep, tremulous breath in a dream. I started, for it had sounded close, and I looked along the obscure deck forward as if, forsooth, there was any sailor on board whose respiration could rise to such a note as *that*! In a moment I spied a block of blackness slowly melting out like a dye of ink upon the indigo of the water with the faint flash of moonlight off the wet round of it. A grampus! thought I; and stared about me for others, but no more showed, and the prodigious midnight hush seemed to float down again from the stars like a sensible weight with one wide ripple from where the great fish had sunk, creeping like a line of oil to the yacht's side and melting soundlessly in her shadow.

This grave-like repose lasted the night through, and when early in the morning, awakened by the light of the newly risen sun, I mounted to the deck, I found the ocean stretched flat as the top of a table, the sky, of a dirty bluish haze, thickening down and merged into the ocean line so that you couldn't see where the horizon was, save just under

the sun where the head of the misty white sparkle in the water defined the junction. It baffled and bothered the sight to look into the distance, so vaporous and heavy it all was, with a dull blue gleam here and there upon the water striking into the faintness like a sunbeam into mist, and all close to, as it seemed, though by hard peering you might catch the glimmer of the calm past the mixture of hazy light and hues where sea and sky seemed to end.

Jacob Crimp had charge. I asked him if all had been quiet below in the cabin.

‘Ay,’ he answered, ‘I’ve heard of nothen to the contrary. Her ledship came on deck during the middle watch and had a bit of a yarn with me.’

‘Indeed!’ said I.

‘Yes, she scared me into a reg’lar clam. I was standing at the rail thinking I see a darkness out under the moon as if a breath of wind were coming along, and a voice just behind me says, “What’s your name?” Nigh hand tarned my hair white to see her, so quiet she came and her eyes like corposants.’

‘What did she talk about?’ said I in a careless way.

‘Asked what the sailor was a-sitting in the cabin for. “To prevent murder being done,” says

I. "Murder!" says she. "Yes," says I, "and to prewent this wessel from being set on fire and blown to yellow blazes," says I, "for God knows," says I, "what weight of gunpowder ain't stowed away forrards." "Who's a-going to do all this?" says she; so I jist told her that Sir Wilfrid had been took worse, and that the order had come forward that the cabin was to be watched.'

'What did she say to that?' I exclaimed.

'Why, walked to t'other side of the deck and sot down and remained an hour, till I reckoned that when she went below she must ha' been pretty nigh streaming with dew.'

'What do you think of the weather, Mr. Crimp?'

'It's agin nature,' he answered. 'Like lying off Blackwall for smoothness. 'Tain't going to last, though. Nothing that's agin nature ever do, whether it's weather, or a dawg with two tails, or a cat with height legs.'

'I wish you were a magician,' said I; 'I'd tassel your handkerchief for a strong breeze. A roasting day with a vengeance, and the first of a long succession, I fear.'

At breakfast I told Miss Laura of Lady Monson's visit on deck in the middle watch, and the mate's blunt statement to her. 'It was a mighty dose of truth to administer,' said I. 'She

will pass some bad quarters of an hour, I fear. Think of old Jacob talking to her of murder and fire, and explosions unto yellow blazes, whatever *that* may mean, with her husband sleeping right abreast of her cabin and armed, as she must know.'

'Has he those pistols?' she asked.

'Yes,' I answered; 'I gave the case to one of the stewards to return to him, and now I am sorry I did so.'

'Of course Henrietta will be frightened,' she exclaimed. 'I do not envy her in her loneliness. Why should she refuse to see me? I easily understand her objection to showing herself on deck by daylight; but I am her sister; I could sit with her; I could be company for her, win her, perhaps,' she said with a wistful look, 'to something like a gentle mood.' She sighed deeply and continued: 'Wilfrid scared me yesterday. There was that in his face which shocked me, but I could not explain what it was. Yet I am not the least bit afraid he will commit any deed of violence. Let him be twenty times madder than he now is, his heart is so tender, his spirit so boy-like, pure, honourable, there is so much of sweetness and affection in his nature that I am certain his cruellest delirium would be tempered by his qualities.'

I was grateful to her for thus speaking of my poor cousin, but I could not agree with her. The qualities she pinned her faith to had suffered him at all events to shoot Colonel Hope-Kennedy and to make nothing of the man's death. Yet, thought I, looking at her, seeing how this sweet little creature values, and to a large extent understands him, what devil's influence was upon the loving, large-hearted, childlike man when he chose the *other* one for his wife? But, fond of him and sorry for him as I was, I could not have wished it otherwise—for my sake at all events; though on her part it would have made her 'her ladyship' and found her a husband whose brain I don't doubt might year by year have grown stronger in the cheerful and fructifying light of her cordial, sympathetic, radiant character.

I looked in upon him after breakfast. Miss Laura wished to accompany me, but I advised her to delay her visit until I had ascertained for myself how he did. He was lying in his bunk, a large pipe in his mouth, at which he pulled so heartily that his cabin was dim with tobacco smoke. His cheek was supported by his elbow and his eyes fixed upon his watch, a superb gold timekeeper that dangled at the extremity of a heavy chain hitched to a little hook screwed into

the deck over his head. On the back of this watch were his initials set in brilliants, and these gems made the golden circle show like a little body of light as it hung motionless before his intent gaze. He did not turn his head when I opened the door, then looked at me in an absent-minded way when I was fairly entered.

‘Ah!’ he exclaimed languidly, ‘it is you, Charles. You promised to sit with me awhile last night.’

‘I did, but the heat below was unendurable. It is no better now. The temperature of this cabin must be prodigious. What calculations are you making?’ said I.

‘None,’ he answered. ‘I have slung the watch to observe if there is any movement in the yacht. She is motionless. Mark it. There is not a hairbreadth of vibration. We are afloat of course?’ he said, suddenly looking at me.

‘I hope so,’ said I. ‘Afloat? Why, what do you suppose, Wilf? That we’ve gone to the bottom?’

‘It would be all one for me,’ he answered with a deep sigh, and then applying himself to his pipe again with a sort of avidity that made one think of a hungry baby sucking at a feeding bottle. He clouded the air with to-

bacco smoke and said: 'I am heartily weary of life.'

'And why?' cried I: 'because we are in a dead calm with the equator close aboard. The very deep is rotting. A calm of this kind penetrates through the pores of the skin, enters the soul and creates a thirsty yearning for extinction. Being younger than you, Wilf, I give myself another twelve hours, and then, if no breeze blows, I shall, like you, be weary of life and desire to die.'

'It is easily managed,' said he.

'Yes,' cried I, startled, 'no doubt; but the weather may change, you know.' And not at all relishing his remark nor the looks that accompanied it, I seized my hat and fell to fanning the atmosphere with the notion of expelling some of the tobacco smoke through the open porthole.

'I am of opinion,' said he, puffing and dropping his words alternately with the clouds he expelled whilst he kept his eyes fixed upon his watch, 'that, spite of the arguments of the divines, life is a free gift to us to be disposed of as we may decide. Nature is invariably compensative. We are brought into this world without our knowledge, and therefore, of course, without our consent, d'ye see, Charles,' and here he rolled his eyes upon me, 'and by way of balancing this distract-

ing obligation of compulsory being, nature says you may do what you like with existence: keep it or part with it'

'I say, Wilfrid,' said I, 'there are surely more cheerful topics for an equinoctial dog-day than this you have lighted on. *Don't* speculate, my dear fellow; leave poor old nature alone. Take short views, and let the puzzling distance unfold and determine itself to your approach. It is the wayfarers who decline to look ahead, who whistle as they trudge along the road of life. The melancholy faces are those whose eyes are endeavouring to see beyond the horizon towards which they are advancing. Tell me now—about this cabin door of yours. My dear fellow, it must be big enough this morning to enable you to pass through; so come along on deck, will you, Wilfrid?'

'Damn it, how blind you are!' he exclaimed.

'No, I'm not,' said I.

'D'ye mean to say that you can't see what's happened to me since we last met?'

'What now, Wilfrid?'

'What now?' he shouted. 'Why, man, I can't stand upright.'

'Why not?' I asked.

'Because I'm too tall for this cabin,' he answered in a voice of passion and grief.

'Pray when did you find that out?' said I.

‘On rising to dress myself this morning,’ he answered, ‘I was obliged to clothe myself in my bunk. What a dreadful blow to befall a man! I can’t even quit my bed now, and everything I want must be handed to me.’

Well, well! thought I; God mend him soon. Hot as it was, a chill ran through me to the crazy wistful, despairful look he directed at me, and I was oppressed for a moment with the same sickness of heart that had visited me during my interview with him on the preceding day.

‘I had resolved to sell the “Bride,”’ said he mournfully, putting his pipe into a shelf at the back of him and folding his hands, which seemed to me to have grown thin and white during the past few days, upon his breast, ‘but I shan’t be able to do so now.’ I was silent. ‘She will have to be broken up,’ he added.

‘Nonsense!’ I exclaimed.

‘But I say *yes*!’ he suddenly roared; ‘how the devil else am I to get out of her!’

‘Oh, I see!’ I answered soothingly, ‘I forgot that. But, Wilf, since you’re too big to use this cabin, for the present only, for I am certain you will dwindle to your old proportions before long, don’t you think you ought to have an attendant constantly with you, some one at hand sitting here to wait upon you?’

‘Why, yes,’ said he, ‘no doubt of it. I am almost helpless now. But I’ll not have that rascal Muffin.’

‘No, no,’ said I. ‘Nor would the stewards make the sort of servants you want. If I were in your place I should like to be waited on by a couple of jolly hearty sailors, fellows to take turn and turn about in looking after me, chaps with their memories full of long yarns, unconventional, sympathetic, no matter how rough their manners, agile, strong as horses, with lively limbs, used to springing about. One or two such men are to be met forward amongst your crew.’

‘A good idea,’ he cried. ‘Gad! after my experiences of Muffin I’d rather be waited upon by the tarriest of tarry tarpaulins than one of your sleek, soft-stepping, trained rogues who come and ask you for a situation with an excellent character in one pocket from their late master, and in the other the contents of his dressing-case. Ha, ha, ha!’ and here he delivered one of his short roars of laughter.

I remained conversing with him until an hour was gone. Now that he had put his pipe down the atmosphere of the cabin grew somewhat endurable, yet the heat was extraordinarily great, and due, so far as one’s sensations went, not more to the temperature than to the incredible motion-

lessness of the yacht, so that there was not the faintest stir of air in the porthole. I spoke of Lady Monson, fancying that the thought of her might help to steady his mind and bring him away from his crazy notions of growth and expansion ; but he would not talk of her ; as regularly as I worked round to the subject of her ladyship, as regularly was he sliding off into some other topic. Sometimes I'd think that feeling had utterly changed in him ; that there had grown up in him for the woman whom he had again and again vowed to me he adored, a loathing to which his innate good taste forbade him to give expression. How it would be if they should meet I could not tell. Her black tragic eyes might not have lost their fascination nor her shape of beauty and dignity its power of delighting and enamouring him. But certainly, as we sat conversing, the sort of cowering air that accompanied his abrupt changing of the subject every time I mentioned his wife's name was strongly suggestive of disgust and aversion. He talked very sensibly save about his dimensions, but I took notice in him of a hankering after the topic of suicide. Several times he tried to bring me into an argument upon it.

‘Am I to be told,’ he said, ‘that a man's life

is not his own? If not, to whom does it belong, pray?’

‘To heaven,’ I responded sullenly.

‘Prove it,’ he sneered.

‘Oh, ’tis too plain and established a fact to need proving,’ said I.

‘If a man’s life is his own,’ he cried, ‘who the deuce in this world has the right to hinder him from doing what he will with it?’

‘Wilf, if this goes on,’ said I, ‘we shall be landed in a religious controversy; a thing unendurable even under the sign of the frozen serpent, but down here with a thermometer at about 112° in the cabin, no ice nearer than 56° north!—see here, my dear cousin, get you small again as soon as you can, back to your old size, join Laura and myself at the table afresh, walk the decks with us, taste the fragrance of a cigar upon the cool night air; realise that your little one is at home waiting for you, and that on your return you will have plenty of homely occupation in looking after those excellent improvements in your property which you were telling me the other day you had in your mind. This sudoriferous speculation as to whether people have a right to hinder a man from taking his life will then exhale.’

And so I would go on chatting, talking him

away, so to speak, from this gloomy subject which his condition rendered depressing and most uncomfortably significant in his mouth.

However, my visit to him had led to one stroke of good, for on quitting him I at once went to Finn, who was on deck, and told him how Sir Wilfrid had fallen into my scheme and was for having a couple of sailors to wait upon him, one of whom should be constantly in his cabin.

‘You must be plain with the fellows, captain,’ said I; ‘tell them that Sir Wilfrid’s craze grows upon him and that he must be narrowly watched, but with tact.’

‘I’ll see to it, sir,’ said he; ‘can’t do better than Cutbill and Furlong, I think. They’re both hearty chaps, chock-a-block with lively yarns, and they’ve both got good tempers. But dorn’t his honour get no better then, sir?’

‘No,’ said I.

‘Dorn’t he feel as if he was a-coming back to his old shape, sir?’

‘On the contrary,’ I answered, ‘yesterday he had only broadened, but this morning he feels so tall that he can’t stand upright.’

‘Well to be sure!’ cried the worthy fellow, with his long face working all over with concern and anxiety. ‘It’s all her ladyship’s doing. It’s her caper-cutting that’s brought him to this.

Such a gentle heart as he has, too, and a true gentleman through and through him when his mind sits square in his head! But lor' bless me, sir, what did he want to go and get married for? 'Tain't as if he'd wanted a home, or a gal with money enough to keep him. Not that it's for me to say a word agin marriage, for my missus has always kept a straight helm steady in my wake ever since I took her in tow. But all the same, I'm of opinion that matrimony is an institootion that don't fit this here earth. It's a sort of lock-up; a man's put into a cell along with a gal. If she's a proper kind of gal, why well and good. The window dorn't seem barred and ye dorn't take much notice of your liberty being gone; but if she tarns out to be of her ladyship's sort, why there's nothen to do but to sing out through the keyhole for a rope to hang yourself with, or, if ye ain't got sperrit enough for that remedy, to hang *her* with.'

The delivery of this harangue seemed to ease his mind, and he went forward with a face tolerably composed to give instructions to the two men who were to serve as companions, or to put it bluntly, as keepers to Wilfrid.

The weather held phenomenally silent and breathless. Just before lunch I went right aft, where I commanded the length of the vessel, and

steadfastly watched her, and though I had my eye upon the line of her jibboom I did not see that the end of the spar lifted or fell to the extent of the breadth of a finger-nail. The sole satisfaction that was to be got out of this unparalleled condition of stagnation was the feeling that it could not possibly last. The dim and dirty blue of the sea went rounding not above a mile distant into a like hue of atmosphere, with a confused, half-blinded vagueness of sky overhead that did not seem to be higher up than twice the height of our masts, and the appearance made you think of sitting in a glass globe sunk a fathom or two under water with the light sifting through to you in a tarnished, misty, ugly azure. A strange part of it was that though the sky was cloudless the atmosphere was so thick you could watch the sun, which hovered shapeless as a jellyfish almost overhead, for a whole minute at a time, without inconvenience; yet his heat bit fiercely for all that; there was a wake, too, under him, flakes of muddy yellow like sheets of a ship's sheathing scaling one under another as though they were going to the bottom in a procession. If you put your hand upon the rail clear of the awning you brought it away with a stamp of pain. I touched the brass binnacle hood by accident and bawled aloud to the burn which raised me a blister on the side

of my hand that lasted for three days. A sort of impalpable steam rose from the very decks, so that if a man stood still a moment you saw his figure trembling in it like the quivering of an object beheld in clear running water. And how am I to express that deeper quality of heat which seemed to come into the atmosphere with the smell of the blistering of paint along the yacht's sides?

Yet there was no fall in the mercury, no hint above or below to indicate a change at hand. Close alongside the burnished water lay clear as crystal and gave back every image with almost startling brilliance. I remember looking over and seeing my face in the clear profound as distinctly as ever I had viewed it in a mirror. It lay like a daguerreotype there. It was of course as deep down as I was high above the surface, and I protest it was like looking at one's self as though one floated a drowned man.

It was the right kind of day for a plunge, and I pined for a swim, for the delight of the cool embrace of the glass-clear brine. But the skipper would not hear of it.

'To the first splash, sir,' he exclaimed, 'there'd sprout up a regular crop of black fins. It isn't because there's nothing showing now that there ain't a deal more than I for one 'ud care to see

close at hand. No, sir; be advised by me; don't you go overboard.'

'Oh, captain,' said I, 'I've been a sailor in my day and of course know how to obey orders. But I've cruised a good deal in my time in John Sharkee's waters, and with all due deference to you I must say that whenever there are sharks about one or more will be showing.'

'Sorry to contradict ye, sir, but my answer's no to that,' he replied. 'Tell 'ee what I'll do, sir—there's nothen resembling a shark hanging round now, is there?'

We both stared carefully over the water, and I said no.

'Well, now, sir,' he exclaimed, 'I'll bet ye a farden's worth of silver spoons that I'll call up a shark to anything I may choose to chuck overboard.'

'Make it a pennyworth of silver spoons,' said I, 'and I'll bet.'

'Done,' said he with a grin, and straightway walked forward. After a little he returned with a canvas-bag stuffed full of rubbish, potato-parings, yarns, shavings enough to make it floatable, and the like. He hitched the end of a leadline to it, jumped on to the taffrail clear of the awning, and whirling it three or four times, sent it speeding some distance away on the quarter. It fell

with a splash, and the blur it made upon the flawless surface was for all the world like the impress of a damp finger upon a sheet of looking-glass. He towed it gently, and scarce had he drawn in three fathoms of the line when a little distance past the bag up shot the fin of a shark with a gleam off its black wetness as though it were a beer-bottle. He hauled the bag aboard and the fin disappeared.

‘Are they to be egg-spoons or dessert-spoons, Finn?’ said I, laughing. ‘By George, I shouldn’t have believed it, though. But it’s always so. Let a man fancy that he knows anything to the very top of it, and he’s sure to fall in with somebody who has a trick above him.’

But it was too hot for shark-fishing, let alone the mess of a capture on our ivory-white planks. At first I was for decoying the beasts to the surface and letting fly at them with one of the muskets below, but Finn suggested that the firing might irritate Sir Wilfrid. What was to be done but lie down and pant? Miss Laura was so overcome by the heat that for once she proved bad company. At lunch she could not eat; she was too languid to talk.

‘Just the afternoon for a game of draughts,’ said I, in playful allusion to the want of air.

She waved away the suggestion with a weak

movement. In fact she was so oppressed that when I told her about Wilfrid's new phase of growth she could only look at me dully as though all capacity of emotion lay swooning in her heart. I sat by her side fanning her, whilst the perspiration hopped from my forehead like parched peas.

'Oh,' cried the little creature, 'how long is this calm going to last? What would I give for an English Christmas day to tumble down out of the sky upon us, with its snow and hail.'

'Let us go on deck,' said I; 'I am certain it is cooler up there.'

We mounted the steps, but she was scarcely out of the companion hatch when she declared it was a great deal hotter above than below, and down she went again. After all, thought I, Sir Wilfrid and his wife are as well off in their cabins as though they had permitted themselves to wander at large about the yacht. Yet it seemed a roasting existence to my fancy for the self-made prisoners when I glanced aft and thought of the size of their cabins, with not air enough to stir a feather in the open ports, and Cutbill's huge form in Wilfrid's berth to give as distinct a rise to the thermometer there as though a stove had been introduced and a fire kindled in it.

All day long it was the same smoky, confused

blending of misty blue water and heaven shrouding down overhead and closing upon us, with the sea like a dish of polished steel set in the midst of it, bright as glass where we lay, then dimming into a bluish faintness in the atmospheric thickness at its confines, and the sun a distorted face of weak yellow brightness staring down as he slid westwards with an aspect that made him look as though he were some newly-created luminary. At about six o'clock he hung over the sea line glowing like a huge live cinder, and the air was filled with his smoky crimson glare that went sifting and tingling into the distance till one was able to see twice as far again, a red gleam of sea opening past the dimness and a delicate liquid dye of violet melting down, as one might have thought, from the highest reaches of the heavens into the eastern atmosphere.

‘Hillo!’ cried I to Jacob Crimp, who was leaning over the side with his face purple with heat and full of loathing of the weather; ‘direct your eyes into the south, will ye, and tell me what you see there?’

He turned with the leisurely action peculiar to merchant-sailors, lifted the sharp of his hand to his brow and peered sulkily in the direction which I had indicated.

‘Clouds,’ said he. ‘Is that what ye mean?’

‘Yes,’ said I, ‘and a very noble and promising coast of them, too, as I believe we shall be finding out presently when the change which I hope their brows are charged with shall have clarified the air.’

In fact I had just then caught sight, away down in the south amidst the haziness there, of some bronze streaks stretching from south-east to south-west, with here and there dashes of exceedingly faint shadow of the colour of flint. Much looking was not needful; it was quickly to be seen that right astern of our course, though as the yacht lay just then the appearance was off the starboard beam, there had gathered and was slowly mounting a long, heavy body of thunderous cloud scarce visible as yet save in its few bronze outlines.

‘It will mean a change I hope,’ said I to Crimp; ‘more than mere thunder and lightning, let us pray. Yet the drop in the glass is scarcely noticeable.’

‘Time something happened anyway,’ said he. ‘Dum me if it ain’t been too hot even for the sharks to show themselves. I allow the “’Liza Robbins” ain’t over sweet just now.’

‘No, I’d rather be you than your brother to-day, Crimp.’

‘Sorry to hear from the captain,’ said he, ‘that

Sir Wilfrid's got the notion in his head that he's growed in the night till he's too tall to stand upright.'

'Yes,' said I, 'and I hope his craze may end at that.'

'There's but one cure for the likes of such tantrums,' said he.

'And pray what is that, Mr. Crimp?'

'Fright. Git the hair of a chap that's mad to stand on end, and see if his crazes don't fly clean off out of it like cannon balls out of a broadside of guns.'

'Ay, but fright, as you call it, might drive my poor cousin entirely mad, Mr. Crimp.'

'No fear,' he answered. 'Tell 'ee what I'll undertake to do. What's the hour now?'

'Call it six o'clock,' said I.

'Well, I'll undertake by half-past six to have Sir Wilfrid running about these 'ere decks.'

'And what's the prescription, pray?'

'Why, there's a scuttle to his cabin, ain't there?'

'Yes,' I answered.

'An' it lies open, I allow, a day like this. Werry well. Give me ten minutes to go forrads and black my face and dress up my head according to the notion that's in my mind; then let me be lowered by a bowline over the side. I pops

my head into the scuttle and sings out in a terrible voice, "Hullo, there! I'm the devil," I says, says I, "and I've come," says I, "to see if ye've got any soul left that's worth treating for." And what d'ye think he'd do at sight of me? Why run out of his cabin as fast as his legs 'ud carry him.'

'More likely let fly a pistol at you,' I exclaimed, laughing at the look of self-complacency with which the sour little fellow eyed me. 'However, Mr. Crimp, we'll leave all remedies for Sir Wilfrid alone till we see what yonder shadow to the southward is going to do for us,' and so saying I stepped below to change my coat for dinner.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A TERRIBLE NIGHT.

MISS LAURA arrived at the dinner table. She was pale with the heat. She toyed with a morsel of cold fowl and sipped seltzer and hock.

‘The dead calm,’ said I, ‘gives you a young lady’s appetite.’

‘I am here,’ she answered, ‘because I do not know where else to be.’

‘You are here,’ said I, ‘because you are good and kind, and know that I delight in your society.’

She fanned herself. As the mercury rises past a certain degree sentiment falls. Emotion lies north and south of the line, hardly on it unless in a black skin. How death-like was the repose upon the yacht! The sun had gone out in the western thickness with a flare like the snuff of a blown-out candle, and a sort of brown dimness as of smoke followed him instead of the staring red and living glare that accompanies his

descent in clear weather in those parts. The cabin lamp was lighted ; it hung without a phantom of vibration, and sitting at that table was like eating in one's dining room ashore. I glanced my eye round the interior. Delicate and elegant was the appearance of the cabin. The mirrors multiplied the white oil flames of the silver burners ; the carpet, the drapery, the upholstery of chairs and couches stole out in rich soft dyes upon the gaze. The table was radiant with white damask and glass and plate and plants. Confronting me was the charming figure of the sweet girl with whom I had been intimately associated for several weeks. Her golden hair sparkled in the lamplight ; from time to time she would lift her violet eye with a drowsy gleam in it to mine.

‘Heat depresses the spirits,’ said I. ‘I feel dull. What is going to happen, I wonder?’

‘Is the wind ever likely to blow again?’ she asked.

‘Yes, I shall have the pleasure of conducting you on deck presently, when I will show you a fine bank of clouds in the south that will be revealed to us by lightning, if I truly gather the character of the vapour from the bronzed lines of it which I witnessed a little while ago.’

‘Have you seen Wilfrid since lunch?’

‘Yes ; he talks very sensibly. He beckoned

me to his bunk side to whisper that Cutbill made him laugh. Anything to divert the dear fellow's mind. I presume you have seen nothing of Lady Monson ?'

'Nothing,' she answered, fanning her pale face till the yellow hair upon her brow danced as though some invisible hand was showering gold dust upon her.

'Jacob Crimp,' said I softly, 'is of opinion that he could drive Wilfrid on deck by blacking his face, looking in upon him through his open porthole, and calling himself the devil.'

'He need not black his face,' said she, with the first smile that I had seen upon her lip that day, 'but if he does anything of the sort I hope he will be treated as Muffin was.'

'Yet I am of opinion,' said I, 'that a great fright would impel Wilfrid to make for the door. He would pass through it of course, and then his hallucination would fall from him.'

She shook her head. 'You must not allow him to be frightened, Mr. Monson.'

'Depend upon it I shan't,' I replied. 'I merely repeat a sour seaman's rude and homely prescription.'

As I spoke the yacht slightly rolled, and simultaneously with the movement, as it seemed, one felt the dead atmosphere of the cabin set in motion.

‘Good!’ I cried, ‘’tis the first of the change. Now heave to it, my beauty!’

Again the yacht softly dipped her side. I jumped up to look at the tell-tale compass, and as I did so the skylight glanced to a pale glare as of sheet lightning. I waited a minute to mark the rolling of the craft that was now dipping sluggishly but steadfastly with rhythmic regularity on undulations which were still exceedingly weak, and found the set of the suddenly risen swell to be north as near as I could judge.

‘Well, Miss Laura,’ said I, ‘I think now we may calculate upon a breeze of wind presently, from a right quarter too.’

I looked at the hour; it was twenty minutes to eight. The death-like hush was broken; the preternatural repose of the last day and night gone. Once more you heard the old familiar straining sounds, the click of hooked doors, the feeble grinding of bulkheads, with the muffled gurgling of water outside mingled with the frequent flap of canvas; but I could be sure that there was no breath of air as yet; not the least noise of rippling flowed to the ear, and the yacht still lay broadside on to her course.

‘Let us go on deck,’ said I.

She sent her maid, who was passing at the moment, for her hat, and we left the cabin.

‘Hillo!’ I cried as I emerged from the companion, holding her hand that lay almost as cold in mine as if it were formed of the snow which it resembled, ‘there’s another of your friends up there, Miss Laura,’ and I pointed to the topgallant yardarm, upon which was floating a corposant, ghastly of hue but beautiful in brilliance.

She looked up and spoke as though she shuddered. ‘Those things frighten me. What can be more ghostly than a light that is kindled as that is? Oh, Mr. Monson, what a wild flash of lightning!’

A wild flash it was, though as far off as the horizon. Indeed it was more than one stroke: a copper-coloured blaze that seemed to fill the heavens behind the clouds with fire, against which incandescent background the sky-line of the long roll of vapour stood out in vast billows black as pitch, whilst from the heart of the mass there fell a light like a fireball, to which the sea there leapt out yellow as molten gold.

I strained my ear. ‘No thunder as yet,’ said I. ‘I hope it is not going to prove a mere electric storm, flames and detonations and an up and down cataract of rain breathless in its passage with a deader calm yet to follow.’

All at once the light at the topgallant yardarm vanished, a soft air blew, and there arose from

alongside a delicate, small, fairy-like noise of the lipping and sipping of ripples.

‘Oh, how heavenly is this wind!’ exclaimed Miss Laura, reviving on a sudden like a gas-dried flower in a shower of rain; ‘it brings my spirits back to me.’

‘Trim sail the watch!’ bawled Crimp. But there was little to trim; all day long the yacht had lain partially stripped. No good, Finn had said, in exposing canvas to mere deadness. She wheeled slowly to the control of her helm, bowing tenderly upon the swell that was now running steadily with an almost imperceptible gathering of weight in its folds, and presently she was crawling along with her head pointing north before the weak fanning, with the lightning astern of her making her canvas come and go upon the darkness as though lanterns green and rose-bright were being flashed from the deck upon the cloths. The sea was pale with fire round about us. Indeed the air was so charged with electricity that I felt the tingling of it in the skin of my head as though it were in contact with some galvanic appliance, and I recollect pulling off my cap whilst I asked Miss Laura if she could see any sparks darting out of my hair. The skylight, gratings, whatever one could sit upon, streamed with dew. I called to the steward for a couple

of camp-stools and placed them so as to obtain the full benefit of the draught feebly breezing down out of the swinging space of the mainsail. The air was hot, and under the high sun it would doubtless have blown with a parching bite that must have rendered it even less endurable than the motionless atmosphere of the calm; but the dew moistened it now; it was a damp night air, with a smell of rain behind it besides, and the gushing of it upon the face was inexpressibly delicious and refreshing.

‘We are but little better than insects,’ said Miss Laura; ‘entirely the children of the weather.’

‘Rather compare us to birds,’ said I; ‘I don’t like insects.’

‘You complained of feeling depressed just now, Mr. Monson. Are you better?’

‘I am the better for this air, certainly,’ said I, ‘but I don’t feel particularly cheerful. I shouldn’t care to go to a pantomime, for instance, nor should I much enjoy a dance. What is it? The influence of that heap of electricity out yonder, I suppose,’ I added, looking at the dense black massed-up line of cloud astern, over all parts of which there was an incessant play of lightning, with copperish glances behind that gave a lining of fire to the edges of the higher reaches of the vast coast of vapour. It was like watching some

gigantic hangings of tapestry wrought in flame. The imagination rather than the eye witnessed a hundred fantastic representations—heads of horses, helmets, profiles of titanic human faces, banners and feathers, and I know not what besides. It was very dark overhead and past the bows; the thickness that had been upon the sky all day was still there; not the leanest phantom of star showed, and the stoop of the heavens seemed the nearer and the blacker for the flashings over our taffrail, and for the pale phosphoric sheets which went wavering on all sides towards the murkiness of the horizon.

I spied Finn conversing with Crimp at the gangway; the lightning astern was as moonlight sometimes, and I could see both men looking aloft and at the weather in the south and consulting. In a few minutes they came our way.

‘What is it to be, Finn?’ said I.

‘Well, sir,’ he answered, ‘this here swell that’s slowly a-gathering means wind. It will be but little more, though, than an electric squall, I think—a deal of fire and hissing and a burst of breeze, and then quietness again with the black smother spitting itself out ahead. The barometer don’t seem to give more caution than that anyway, sir. But there’s never no trusting what ye can’t see through.’

He turned to Crimp. 'Better take the main-sail off her, Jacob,' said he, 'and let her slide along under her foresail till we see what all that there yonder sinnifies.'

The order was given; the sailors tumbled aft; the great stretch of glimmering, ashen cloths, burning and blackening alternately as they reflected the tempestuous flares withered upon the dusk as the peak and throat halliards were settled away; the sail was furled, the huge mainboom secured, and the watch went forward softly as cats upon their naked feet.

Ha! what is that? Right ahead, on a line with our bowsprit, there leapt from the black breast of the sea, on the very edge of the ocean, if not past it, a body of flame, brilliant as sunshine but of the hue of pale blood. It came and went, but whilst it lived it made a ghastly and terrifying daylight of the heavens and the water in the north, revealing the line of the horizon as though the sun's upper limb were on a level with it till the circle of the sea could have been followed to either quarter.

'*That* was not lightning,' cried Miss Laura in a voice of alarm.

'Finn,' I shouted, 'did you see that?'

'Ay, sir,' he cried with an accent of astonishment from the opposite side of the deck.

‘What in the name of thunder was it, think you?’ I inquired.

‘Looked to me like a cloud of fire dropped clean out of the sky, sir,’ he answered.

‘No, no,’ exclaimed the hoarse voice of the fellow who grasped the helm, ‘my eye was on it, capt’n. It rose up.’

‘Listen,’ cried I, ‘if any report follows it.’

But we could hear no sound save the distant muttering of thunder astern.

‘It looked as though a ship had blown up,’ said Miss Laura.

‘I say, captain,’ I called, ‘d’ye think it likely that a vessel has exploded down there?’

‘There’s been nothen in sight, sir,’ he answered.

‘And why? Because the atmosphere has been blind all day,’ I replied. ‘You’d see the light of an explosion when the craft herself would be hidden.’

‘Twarn’t no ship, sir,’ muttered the fellow at the wheel, considering himself licensed by the excitement of the moment to deliver his opinion. ‘I once see the like of such a flare as that off the Maldives.’

‘What was it?’ inquired Miss Laura.

‘A sea-quake, miss.’

‘Ha!’ I exclaimed, ‘that’ll be it, Finn.’

We fell silent, all of us gazing intently ahead, never knowing but that another wild light would show that way at any moment. Though I was willing enough to believe it to have been a volcanic upheaval of flame, I had still a fancy that it might be an explosion on board a ship too, some big craft that had been out of sight all day in the thickness; and I kept my eyes fixed upon the horizon in that quarter with a half-formed fancy in me of witnessing something there by the light of some stronger flash than the rest out of the stalking and lifting blackness astern of us.

‘I cannot help thinking,’ said Miss Laura, rising as she spoke, and arching her fingers above her eyes to peer through the hollow of her hands, ‘that I sometimes see a pale, steam-like column resembling ascending smoke that spreads out on top in the form of a palm-tree. *Now* I see it!’ she cried, as a brilliant flash behind us sent its ghastly yellow into the far confines ahead, till the whole ocean lifted dark and flat to it.

The thunder began to rattle ominously, the light breeze faltered, and the foresail swung sulkily to the bowing of the vessel upon the swell that was distinctly increasing in weight. We all looked, but none of us could distinguish anything resembling the appearance the girl indicated.

‘If the flame rose from the sea,’ said I, ‘it is

tolerably certain to have sent up a great body of steam. That is, no doubt, what you see, Miss Jennings.'

'It lingers,' she exclaimed, continuing to stare.

'The draught's a-taking off,' rumbled Finn.
'Stand by for a neat little shower.'

As the air died away it grew stiflingly hot again, hotter, it seemed, than it was before the breeze blew. The huge volumes of dense shadows astern were literally raining lightning; the swell ran in molten glass, and the still comparatively subdued roar of the thunder came rolling along those sweeping, polished brows as though the ocean were an echoing floor and there were a body of giants away down where the lightning was sending colossal bowls at us.

All at once, and in a manner to drive the breath out of one's body with the suddenness and astonishment of it, the yacht's bows rose to a huge roller that came rushing at her from right ahead. Up she soared till I dare say she showed twenty foot of her keel forward out of water. The vast liquid mass swept past the sides with a roar that drowned the cannonading of the heavens. Down flashed the vessel's bows whilst her stem stood up as though she were making her last plunge. I grasped Laura by the waist, clipping hold of a backstay just in time to save us both from being

dashed on the deck. Finn staggered and was thrown. Out of the obscurity in the fore part of the schooner rose a wild, hoarse cry of dismay and confusion mingled with the din of crockery tumbling and breaking below, and the grinding sound of movable objects sliding from their places. Heaven and earth, what is it? Another! Not so mountainous this time, but a terribly heavy roller nevertheless. Up rose the yacht again to it, then down fell her stem with a boiling of white waters about her bow, amid the seething of which and the thunder of the liquid volume rushing from off our counter you heard a second cry, or rather groan of amazement and alarm, from the sailors forward, with more distracting noises below.

I continued to grip Laura and to hold firmly to the backstay with my wits almost scattered by the incredible violence of the yacht's soaring and plunging, and by the utter unexpectedness of the swift, brief, headlong dance. But now the yacht floated on a level keel again and continued so to float, the calm being as dead as ever it had been in the most stagnant hour of the day, saving always the southerly undulation which the two gigantic rollers had temporarily flattened out, though the heaving presently began again. I saw Finn rubbing his nose like a dazed man as he stood staring towards the lightning.

‘What could it have been?’ cried Laura.

‘Two volcanic seas, mum,’ answered the fellow who grasped the wheel; ‘there’s most times three. Capt’n, beg pardon, sir, but that ’ll ha’ been a mighty bust up yonder to have raised a weight of rollers to be felt as them two was all this distance away.’

‘The most surprising thing that ever happened to me, Mr. Monson,’ cried Finn, still bewildered.

A great drop of rain—a *drop* do I call it? it seemed as big as a hen’s egg—splashed upon my face, and at the same moment a flash of lightning swept an effulgence as of noontide into heaven and ocean, followed rapidly by an ear-splitting burst of thunder.

‘Finn’s little shower is beginning,’ said I, grasping Laura’s hand; ‘let us take shelter. Anyway the wet should cool the atmosphere if no wind follows. Bless me! how disgusting if it’s to prove merely a thunderstorm.’

I conducted her to the cabin. At the foot of the companion steps stood Lady Monson. She was without a hat, her face was of a deadly white, her large black eyes glowed with terror, her hair was roughly adjusted on her head, and long raven-hued tresses of it lay upon her shoulder and hung down her back. I could well believe that the old lord whom Laura had met at my

cousin's found something in this woman's tragic airs and stately person to remind him of Mrs. Siddons as Lady Macbeth.

'What has happened?' she exclaimed, addressing me without noticing her sister. I explained. 'Are we in danger?' she exclaimed, with an imperious sweep of her fiery eyes over my figure as though she could not constrain herself to the condescension of looking me full in the face.

'I believe not,' said I coldly, making as though to pass on, for I abhorred her manner and was shocked by her treatment of her sister.

She stood a moment looking up; but there came just then a fierce flash of lightning; she covered her eyes; at the same moment somebody on deck closed the companion. She then, without regarding us, went to her cabin.

Hardly had we seated ourselves when down plumped the rain. It seemed to roll over the edge of the cloud like the falls of Niagara, in a vast unbroken sheet of water. There was as much hail as rain; the stones of the bigness you find only in the tropics where there is plenty of lightning to manufacture them, and the sound of the downrush as it struck the deck and set the sea boiling was so deafening that, though the thunder was roaring almost overhead, nothing

was to be heard of it. The lightning was horribly brilliant, and the cabin seemed filled with the sulphur-smelling blazes, though there was only a comparatively small skylight for them to show through. In a few minutes the rush of rain slackened, the volleying claps and rolling peals of thunder were to be heard again, with a noise, in the intervals, of the gushing of water overboard from our filled decks.

‘I hope the lightning will not strike the yacht,’ exclaimed Laura.

‘There is no safer place in a thunderstorm than a vessel in the middle of the wide ocean,’ I answered.

At that moment the burly form of Cutbill came out of Wilfrid’s cabin. His head dodged to right and left awhile in the corridor whilst he sought to make out who we were, then distinguishing us he approached.

‘Beg pardon, sir,’ he exclaimed, ‘but his honour’s growed very crazy, and wants to know what was the cause of the yacht pitching so heavily just now.’

‘I will go to his berth and explain,’ said I.

‘Oh, Mr. Monson, please don’t leave me,’ cried Laura. ‘The lightning terrifies me.’

‘Then Cutbill,’ said I, ‘give my love to Sir Wilfrid and tell him that the pitching of the

yacht was to a couple of seas caused, as we suppose, by a submarine earthquake away down in the north, probably fifteen miles distant.'

'Thought as much, sir,' said Cutbill, from whose face the perspiration was streaming, whilst his immense whiskers sparkled like a dew-laden bramble-bush in sunrise.

'Also explain that I do not desire to leave Miss Jennings until this deafening and blinding business is over. I shall hope to carry my pipe to his berth by-and-by. But it must be very hot for you, Cutbill, in that cabin?'

'Melting, sir. I feel to be a-draining away. Reckon there'll be nothen left of me but my clothes if this here lasts.'

'How is Sir Wilfrid?'

'Well, sir, to be honest, I don't at all like what I see in him. There's come a sing'ler alteration in him. Can't xactly describe it, sir; sort of stillness, and a queer whiteness of face, and a constant watching of me; his eyes are never off me, indeed. The heat'll have a deal to do with it, I dessay.'

'Some change may be at hand,' said I, 'from which he may emerge with his miserable hallucinations gone. Yet the heat should account for a deal too. Give him my message, Cutbill.'

The man knuckled his forehead and with-

drew. The heat was so great owing to the companion hatch and skylight being closed, that my sweet companion seemed half dead with it, and leaned against me with her eyes closed, almost in a swoon. But the worst of the storm was over apparently, for the rain had ceased, and though the lightning was still intensely vivid, one knew by the sound of the thunder that what was fiercest had forged ahead of us and was settling away into the north. I called to the steward to open the companion doors and report the state of the weather. The moment the hatch lay clear to the night I felt a gush of refreshing and rain-sweetened air. Laura sat upright and gave a deep sigh.

‘Does it rain, steward?’ I sung out.

‘No, sir.’

‘Tell Captain Finn,’ said I, ‘to get some space of deck swabbed dry for Miss Jennings. The heat here is too much for the young lady.’

In a few moments I heard the slapping of several swabs and Finn’s long face glimmered through the open skylight. ‘The weather’s a-clearing, sir,’ he called down. ‘There’s a nice little air a-blowing. The lady’ll find the port side of the quarter-deck comfortable now.’

I conducted the girl up the ladder, but she kept her hand in my arm. Her manner had

something of clinging in it, not wholly due to fear either. It was, in fact, as though she was influenced by an overpowering sense of loneliness, easy to understand when one thought of Wilfrid lying mad in his cabin and her sister, shunning her with hate and rage.

What Finn meant by saying the weather was *clearing* I could not quite understand. It was pitch black to windward, that is to say, right over the stern, whence there was a small breeze blowing in faint, fitful, weak gusts as though irresolute. The thunderstorm was ahead and its rage seemed spent, for the lightning was no longer plentiful or brilliant and the thunder had faded into a sullen muttering. A lantern or two had been brought up from below by whose feeble lustre you witnessed the shadowy forms of seamen swabbing the decks or squeezing the water with scrubbing brushes into the scuppers. The dark swell ran regularly and with power from the south, but there was nothing to be seen of it saving here and there the glittering of green sea fire upon some running brow to let you guess how tall it was. I went aft with Laura and looked over; the wake was a mere dim, glistening, crawling, dying out after a few fathoms. Indeed, the yacht had but the foresail on her with a headsail or two, and she seemed to owe what small way she

was making more to the heave of the swell than to the light breeze. The darkness was a wonderful jumble of shadows. I never remember the like of such confusion of inky dyes. The obscurity resembled an atmosphere of smoke denser in one place than another, a little thin yonder, then just over the mastheads a stooping belly of soot, elsewhere a sort of faintness merging into impenetrable darkness.

‘Lay aft and loose the mains’l,’ rattled out Finn. ‘Double reef and then set it.’

The breeze now began to freshen; the watch came running on to the quarter-deck and presently the wan space of double-reefed canvas slowly mounted.

‘I wish it would brighten a bit astern,’ said I; ‘no wolf’s throat could be blacker. There’ll be more than a capful of wind there, but it will blow the right way for us, so let it come.’

‘I feel,’ said Laura, ‘as though I had recovered perfect health after a dreadful illness.’

‘Now she walks,’ cried Finn, approaching where we stood to peer over the side; ‘blow, my sweet breeze. By the nose on my face, Mr. Monson, I smell a strong wind a-coming.’

It did not need the faculty of smell to hit the truth. The breeze was freshening as if by magic. A little sea was already running and the yeasty

flashing of breaking heads spread far into the gloom. A loud noise of torn and simmering waters came from the bows and a white race of foam was speeding arrowlike from under the counter.

‘There is my sister,’ whispered Laura.

I instantly spied the tall figure of Lady Monson standing on the top step of the companion ladder taking in the deep refreshment of the wind. She stepped on to the deck, approached, saw us, and crossed to the other side. She called to Captain Finn.

‘Yes, my lady.’

‘A chair, if you please. I will sit here.’

A seat was procured from the cabin and placed for her abreast of the wheel close against the bulwarks. This time Laura was not to be driven below by the presence of her sister. The heat in the cabin outweighed her sensitiveness, and then again there was the darkness of the night which sundered the sides of the deck as effectually as if each had been as far off as the horizon. Yet for all that, the sort of fear in which she held Lady Monson subdued her now through the mere sense of the woman being near, scarce visible as she was, just a shadow against the bulwarks. I had to bend my ear to catch her voice through the hissing of the wind aloft and the singing and the seething of the foam alongside, so

low was her utterance. We sat together right aft against the grating on the port side. The helmsman stood near with his eyes on the illuminated compass bowl, the reflection of which touched him as with a lining of phosphor and exposed a kind of gilded outline of his figure against the blackness as he stood swinging upon the wheel with a twirl of it now and again to left or to right as the vessel's course on the compass card floated to port or starboard of the lubber's mark. Though it was Finn's watch below he kept the deck with Crimp, rendered uneasy by the thunder-black look of the night, along with the freshening wind and the lift of seas leaping with a foul-weather snappishness off the ebony slopes of the swell that had grown somewhat heavy and hollow. I could just distinguish the dark forms of the two men pacing the deck abreast of the gangway. The main sheet was well eased off, the great boom swung fairly over the quarter, and there was a note of howling in the pouring of the wind, as it swept with increasing power into the glimmering ashen hollow of the reefed canvas and rushed away out from under the foot of it. There was no more lightning; the sea with its glancings of foam went black as ink to the ink of the heavens. There was no star, no break of faintness on high. The yacht flashed through the mighty shadow, whitening a long narrow furrow

behind her, and helped by every dusky fold that drove roaring to her counter.

On a sudden there arose a loud and fearful cry forward.

‘Breakers ahead!’

The hoarse voice rang aft sheer through the shrill volume of the wind strong as a trumpet-note with the astonishment and fear in it.

Finn went to the side to look over, whilst I heard him roar out to Crimp, ‘Breakers in his eye. The nearest land’s a thousand miles off.’

I jumped up and thrust my head over the rail and saw, sure enough, startlingly close ahead a throbbing white line that, let it be what else it might, bore an amazing resemblance to the boiling of surf at the base of a cliff. There was nothing else to be seen; the pallid streak stretched some distance to right and left. ‘It’ll be a tide rip, sir!’ shouted Finn to me, and his figure melted into the obscurity as he went forward to view the appearance from the forecastle.

I continued peering. ‘No, it is breakers by heaven!’ I cried, with a wild leap of my heart into my very throat to the dull thunderous warring note I had caught during an instant’s lull in the sweep of the wind past my ear.

Laura came to my side; we strained our eyes together.

‘Breakers, my God!’ I cried again, ‘we shall be into them in a minute.’

Then out of the blackness on the forecastle there came from Finn, though ’twas hard to recognise his voice, a fierce, half shrieking cry: ‘Hard a starboard! Hard a starboard!’

I rushed to the wheel to assist the man in putting it hard over. At that instant the yacht struck! In a breath the scene became a hellish commotion of white waters leaping and bursting fiercely alongside, of yells and cries from the men, of screams from Lady Monson, of the grinding and splintering of wood, the cracking of spars, the furious beating of canvas. I felt the hull lifted under my feet with a brief sensation of hurling, then crash! she struck again. The shock threw me on my back; though I was half stunned I can distinctly recollect hearing the ear-splitting, soul-subduing noise of the fall of the mainmast, that broke midway its height and fell with all its gear and weight of canvas like a thunderbolt from the heavens on the port side of the vessel, shattering whole fathoms of bulwark. I sprang to my feet; Laura had me by the arm when I fell and she still clung to me. There was a life-buoy close beside us; it hung by a lanyard to a peg. I whipped it off and got it over Laura’s head and under her arms, and the next thing I

remember is dragging her towards the fore-castle, where I conceived our best chance would lie.

What had we struck? There was no land hereabouts. If we had not run foul of the hulk of some huge derelict buried from the sight in the blackness and revealing nothing but the foam of the seas beating against it, then we must have been caught by a second volcanic upheaval into whose fury we had rushed whilst the devilish agitation was in full play. So I thought, and so I remember thinking; but that even a rational reflection could have entered my mind at such a time, that my brain should have retained the power of keeping its wits in the least degree collected, I cannot but regard as a miracle, when I look back out of this calm mood into the distraction and horror and death of that hideous night. The seas were breaking in thunder shocks over the vessel; the wind was hoary with flying clouds of froth. In a few instants the 'Bride' had become a complete wreck aloft. Upon whatever it was that she had struck she was rapidly pounding herself into staves, and the horrible work was being expedited outside her by the blows of the wreckage of spars which the seas poised and hurled at her with the weight and rage of battering rams. The decks were yawning and splitting under foot; every white curl of sea flung inboard

black fragments of the hull. There is nothing in language to express the uproar, the cries and groans and screams of men maimed and mutilated by the fall of the spars or drowning alongside. I thought of Wilfrid; but the life of the girl who was clinging to me was dearer to my heart than his or my own. I could hear Lady Monson screaming somewhere forward as I dragged Laura towards the forecastle. Sailors rushed against me, and I was twice felled in measuring twenty paces. The agony of the time gave me the strength of half-a-dozen men; the girl was paralysed, and I snatched her up in my arms and drove forward staggering and reeling, blinded with the flying wet, half drowned by the incessant play of seas over the side, feeling the fabric crumbling under my feet as you feel sand yielding under you as the tide crawls upon it. I knew not what I was about nor what I aimed at doing. I believe I was influenced by the notion that since the yacht had struck bow on, her forecastle would form the safest part of her as lying closest to whatever it was that she had run foul of. I recollect that as I approached the fore rigging, stumbling blindly with the girl in my arms, a huge black sea swept over the forward part of the wreck and swept the galley away with it as though it had been a house of cards. The rush

of water floated me off my legs ; I fell and let go of Laura. Half suffocated I was yet in the act of rising to grope afresh for her when another sea rolled over the rail and I felt myself sweeping overboard with the velocity that a man falling from the edge of a cliff might be sensible of!

What followed is too dream-like for me to determine. Some small piece of floating spar I know I caught hold of, and that is what I best and perhaps only remember of that passage of mortal anguish.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A VOLCANIC ISLAND.

I LOST my senses after I had been in the water a few minutes: whether through being nearly strangled by the foam which broke incessantly over me, or through being struck by some fragment of the wreck I cannot say. Yet I must have retained my grip of the piece of spar I had grabbed hold of on being swept overboard with the proverbial tenacity of the drowning, for I found myself grasping it when I recovered consciousness. I lay on my back with my face to the sky, and my first notion was that I had dropped asleep on the yacht's deck, and that I had been awakened by rain falling in torrents. But my senses were not long in coming to me, and I then discovered that what I believed to be rain was salt spray flying in clouds upon and over me from a thunderous surf that was roaring and raging within a few strides. It was very dark, there was nothing to be seen but the white boiling of the

near waters with the intermittent glancing of the heads of melting seas beyond. I felt with my hands and made out that I was lying on something as hard as rock, honey-combed like a sponge. This I detected by passing my hand over the surface as far as I could reach without rising. After a little I caught sight of a black shadow to the right thrown into relief by the broad yeasty throbbing amid which it stood. It was apparently motionless, and I guessed it to be a portion of the 'Bride.' The wind howled strongly, and the noise of the breaking seas was distracting. Yet the moment I had my mind, as I may say, fully, I was sensible of a heat in the air very nearly as oppressive as had been the atmosphere in the cabin of the yacht that evening; and this in spite of the wind which blew a stiff breeze and which was full of wet besides. Then it was that there entered my mind the idea that the yacht had struck and gone to pieces upon a volcanic island newly hove up in that sudden great flame which had leapt upon our sight over the 'Bride's' bows some two or three hours before at a distance, as we had computed, of fifteen miles, and which had seemed to set the whole of the northern heavens on fire.

I felt round about me with my hands again; the soil was unquestionably lava, and the heat in

it was a final convincing proof that my conjecture was right. I rose with difficulty, and standing erect looked about, but I could distinguish nothing more than a mere surface of blackness blending with and vanishing in the yelling and hissing night flying overhead. I fell upon my knees to grope in that posture some little distance from the surf to diminish by my withdrawal something of the pelting of the pitiless storm of spray; and well it was that I had sense enough to crawl in this manner, for I had not moved a yard when my hand plunged into a hole to the length of my arm. The cavity was full of water, deep enough to have drowned me for all I knew, whilst the orifice was big enough to receive three or four bodies of the size of mine lashed together. There was no promise of any sort of shelter. The island, as well as I could determine its configuration by the surf which circled it, went rounding out of the sea in a small slope after the pattern of a turtle shell. However, I succeeded in creeping to a distance where the spray struck me without its former sting, and then I stood up and putting my hands to the sides of my mouth shouted as loud as my weak condition would suffer me.

A voice deep and hoarse came back like an echo of my own from a distance, as my ear might conjecture, of some twenty paces or so.

‘Hallo! Who calls?’

‘I, Mr. Monson. Who are you?’

‘Cutbill,’ he roared back.

I brought my hands together grateful to God to hear him, for how was I to know till then but that I might be the only survivor of the yacht’s company?

‘Can you come to me, Cutbill?’ I cried.

‘I don’t like to let go of the lady, sir,’ he answered.

‘Which lady?’ I shouted.

‘Miss Jennings.’

‘Is she alive, Cutbill?’

‘Ay, sir.’

By this time my sight was growing used to the profound blackness. The clouds of pallid foam along the margin of the island flung a sort of shadow of ghastly illumination into the atmosphere, and I fancied I could see the blotch the figure of Cutbill made to the right of me on the level on which I stood. I forthwith dropped on my knees again and cautiously advanced, then more plainly distinguished him, and in a few minutes was at his side. It was the shadowy group, the outlines barely determinable by my sight, even when I was close to, of the big figure of the sailor seated with the girl supported on his arm. I put my lips close to the faint glimmer of

her face, and cried 'Laura, dearest, how is it with you? Would God it had been my hand that had had the saving of you!'

She answered faintly, 'Take me; let me rest on you!'

I put my arm round her and brought her head to my breast and so held her to me. Soaked as we were to the skin like drowned rats, the heat floating up out of the body of volcanic stuff on which we lay prevented us from feeling the least chill from the pouring of the wind through our streaming clothes.

'Oh, my God, Laura!' I cried, 'I feared you were gone for ever when I lost my hold of you.'

'The life-buoy you put on saved me,' she exclaimed, so faintly that I should not have heard her had not my ear been close to her lips.

'The lady had a life-buoy on, sir,' said the deep voice of Cutbill; 'she was stranded alongside of me, and I dragged her clear of the surf and have been holding of her since, for this here soil is a cuss'd hard pillow for the heads of the likes of her.'

'Are you hurt, Cutbill?'

'No, sir, not a scratch that I'm aware of. I fell overboard and a swell run me ashore as easy as jumping. But I fear most of 'em are drowned.'

‘Lady Monson?’ I cried.

‘I don’t know, sir.’

‘And my cousin?’

‘Mr. Monson!’ he exclaimed in a broken voice, ‘the instant I felt what had happened I laid hold of Sir Wilfrid to drag him on deck. He yelled out and clung, and ’twould have been like mangling the gentleman, sir, to have used my whole strength upon him if so be as my arms had been equal to the job of even making him budge. I gave up; I wanted to save my life, sir; I could hear the vessel going to pieces and reckoned upon his following me if I ran out. I fear he’s drowned, sir.’

‘Ah, great heaven! Poor Wilf! Merciful Father, that this desperate voyage should end thus!’

I felt the girl shuddering and trembling on my breast.

‘Darling,’ I cried, ‘take heart. Daylight has yet to tell us the whole story. How sudden! how shocking! Cutbill, you have lungs; for God’s sake, hail the darkness, that we may know if others are living!’

He did so: a faint halloo, sounding some distance from the right, replied. He shouted again and an answer was again returned, this time in another voice; it was feebler, but it

proved at all events that there were others besides ourselves who had survived the destruction of the yacht. What the hour was I did not know. The night wore away with intolerable and killing slowness, the wind decreased, the sea moderated, the boiling of the surf that had been fierce for a long while took a subdued note, and the wind blew over us free of spray. Till daybreak I was cradling Laura on my arm. Frequently she would sit up to lighten the burthen of her form, but as often as she did so, again would she bring her head to my breast. What the dawn was to reveal I could not imagine, yet I felt so much happiness in the thought of Laura's life being spared and in having her at my side, that I awaited the disclosures of daybreak without dread.

At last there came a sifting of grey light into the east. By this time there was no more than a gentle wind blowing ; but the sky had continued of an impenetrable blackness all night, and when day broke I witnessed the reason of the oppressive obscurity in a surface of leaden cloud that lay stretched all over the face of the heavens without the least break visible in it anywhere.

It was natural that the moment light enough stole into the atmosphere to see by my first look should be at the girl by my side. Her head was

uncovered; I in slipping on the lifebuoy, or Cutbill in removing it from her, had bared her hair, and the beautiful gold of it lay like a cloud upon her back and shoulders. It was as dry as were our clothes: the heat of the island had indeed served us an oven. She was deadly pale, hollow-eyed, with a shadow as of the reflection of a spring leaf under each eye; her lips blanched, her countenance piteous with its expression of fear. Her dress had been torn by the wreckage: more shipwrecked than she no girlish figure could ever have looked, yet her beauty stole through all like a spirit breathing in her, and I could not release her without first pressing her to my heart and kissing her hand and fondling it, whilst I thanked God that she was alive and that we were together.

The yacht had broken in half from a few feet abaft of where her foremast had stood. All the after part of her had disappeared; nothing remained but the bows with the black planks winding round, jagged, twisted, broken; an incredible ruin! The putty-coloured shore that looked to the eye to trend with something of the smoothness of pumice-stone to the wash of the surf was dark with wreckage. I saw several figures lying prone amongst this litter of ribs and planks and cases and the like; there were others again recumbent

higher up—five of them I counted—a few hundred paces distant, two of whom, as the three of us sat casting our eyes about us, slowly rose to their legs to survey the scene. One of these was Finn, the other one of the crew of the ‘Bride.’

I exclaimed, pointing to the furthest of the three figures who continued recumbent, ‘Isn’t that a woman?’

Cutbill stared; Laura, whose eyes were keen, said ‘Yes. Is it Henrietta or my maid?’

Finn perceived us and held up his hand and made as if to come to us; but on a sudden he pressed his side, halted, and then slowly seated himself. I gazed eagerly around me for signs of further life. It was now clear daylight, with a thinning of the leaden sky in the east that promised a sight of the sun presently with assurance of a clear sky a little later on. It was to be easily seen now that this island which had brought about the destruction of the “Bride” was a volcanic upheaval created in the moment of the prodigious blaze of light we had viewed in the north. It was of the form of an oyster-shell, going with a rounded slope to amidships from one margin to another, and was everywhere of a very pale sulphur colour. It was within a

mile in circumference, and, therefore, but a very short walk in breadth, and at its highest point rose to between twelve and fifteen feet above the sea. There stood, however, on the very apex of it, if I may so term the central point of its rounded back, a vast lump of rock, as I took it to be. But my eye ran over it incuriously. We were making towards Finn and the others when I glanced at it, and my mind was so full that I gave the thing no heed.

It was necessary to walk with extreme caution. The island was like a sponge, as I have before said, punctured with holes big and little, some large as wells and apparently deep. But for these holes walking would have been easy, for everywhere between the surface was as smooth as if it had been polished. In many parts a sort of vapour-like steam crawled into the air. Now that the wind was gone you felt the heat of this amazing formation striking up into the atmosphere, and I confess my heart fell sick in me on considering how it should be when the sun shone forth in power and mingled the sting of its glory with the oven-like temperature of this fire-created island.

There were many dead fish about, some floating belly up in the wells, others dry, of all sizes and sorts, with the dark blue, venomous form of a

dead shark a full fifteen feet long close down by the edge of the sea, about forty paces to the left of the wreck.

Laura walked without difficulty. She leaned upon my arm, but there was no weight in her pressure. The lifebuoy had held her head well above water, and she had been swept ashore without suffering; the resting of her limbs, too, through the long hours of the night had helped her; there was comfort also in the dryness of her clothes, and I was very sensible likewise that my presence gave her heart and spirit.

‘It is Henrietta!’ she exclaimed.

Yes! the figure that at a distance might have passed for Lady Monson or Laura’s maid now proved the former. She had been resting some little distance apart from the others with her head upon her arm, but suddenly she sat upright and looked fixedly towards us. She, like Laura, was without covering to her head; her pomp of black hair fell with gipsy wildness to her waist; her posture was so still, her regard of us so stubbornly intent that I feared to discover her mind was wanting.

‘I will go to her,’ said Laura.

Yet I witnessed the old recoil in her as though there was nothing in the most tragic of all conditions to bate her sister’s subduing influence. She

withdrew her hand from my arm and pressed forwards ; as she approached, Lady Monson slowly rose, tottered towards her, threw her clasped hands upwards with her face upturned, and then fell upon Laura's neck.

Finn called feebly to me, 'God be praised you're safe, Mr. Monson, and sound, I hope, sir? And how is it with ye, mate?' addressing Cutbill.

I grasped his hand ; the tears gushed into his eyes, and he pointed towards the wreck and to the bodies amongst the stuff that had been washed ashore, whilst he slowly shook his head. He looked grey, haggard, hollow, ill, most miserable, as though he had lived ten years since last night and was sick and near his end.

'Cap'n,' cried Cutbill in a broken voice, ' 'twas no man's fault. Who's to keep a lookout for islands after this pattern? '

I seated myself by Finn's side. 'Keep up your heart,' said I. 'You are not hurt, I trust? '

'Something struck me here,' said he, putting his hand to his left breast, 'whilst I was swimming, and it makes me feel a bit short-winded. But it isn't that what hurts me, Mr. Monson. It's the thoughts of them who've gone, and the sight of what was yesterday, sir, the sweetest craft afloat. Who'd have thought she'd have crumbled up so fast? reg'larly broke her back and gone

into staves aft ! She was staunch, but only as a pleasure wessel is.'

I asked Cutbill to examine the people who were lying on what I must call the beach, and report if there was any life in them.

'My cousin is drowned,' I said to Finn.

'Oh, blessed God !' he answered. 'Cutbill knows ; he couldn't get him out of his berth, I allow?'

'Ay, that was it,' I said, 'but this is no time for grieving for the dead, Finn. Regrets are idle. How are we who are spared to save our lives? Are the yacht's boats all gone.'

I ran my eye along the beach and over the sea, but nothing resembling a boat was visible. The sailor that had stood up with Finn when I had first caught sight of them had seated himself a little distance away Lascar fashion, and I noticed him at that moment dip his forefinger into a hole close beside him, suck it and then drink by lifting water in the palm of his hand. I called to him, 'Is it fresh?'

'Pretty nigh, sir,' he answered.

There was such another little hole near me half full of water, as indeed was every well or aperture of the kind that I saw. I dipped as the sailor had and found the water slightly, but only very slightly, brackish. This I concluded was

owing to the overwhelming weight of rain that had followed the upheaval of this island overflowing the hollows and holes in it so abundantly as to drown the salt water, with which, of course, the cavities had been filled when this head of lava had been forced to the surface. I bade Finn dip his hand and taste, and told him that our first step must be to hit upon some means of storing a good supply before the heat should dry up the water.

There were two sailors lying close together a few yards from where the seaman had squatted himself, and I called to him to know if they were alive. He answered yes and shouted to them, on which they turned their heads, and one of them languidly rose to his elbows, the other lay still.

‘It will be the wreckage that drowned most of them and that hurt them that’s come off with their lives,’ exclaimed Finn. ‘It was like being thrown into whirling machinery. How many shall we be able to muster? I fear *they’re* but bodies, sir,’ indicating the figures over which Cutbill was stooping.

All this while Laura and her sister were standing and conversing. I was starting to walk to the wreckage that stood at the foreshore, when Laura slightly motioned to me to approach her. I at once went to her, watching every foot of

ground I measured, for the island was just a surface of pitfalls and one could not imagine how deep the larger among them might prove. Lady Monson bowed to me with as much dignity as if she were receiving me in a ball-room. Her face looked like a dead woman's vitalised by some necromantic agency, so preternatural was the ghastly air produced by the contrast between the tomb-like tincture of the flesh and the raven blackness of her mass of flowing hair, and the feverish glow in her large dark eyes. I returned her salutation, and she extended a lifeless, ice-cold hand.

‘I am asking Laura what is to become of us?’ she exclaimed with a distinct hint of her imperious nature in her voice, and fastening her eyes upon me as from a habit of commanding with them.

‘I cannot tell,’ I answered; ‘our business is to do the best we can for ourselves.’

‘How many are living?’ she asked.

‘We do not as yet know, but I fear no more than you see alive. My cousin is drowned, I fear.’

Her eyes fell, she drew a deep breath and continued looking down; then her gaze full of a sudden fire flashed to my face again.

‘I am not accountable for his death, Mr.

Monson. Why do you speak significantly of this dreadful thing? I did not desire his death. I would have saved his life had the power to do so been given to me. Oh God!' she cried, 'it is cruel to talk or to look so as to make me feel as if the responsibility of all this were mine!'

She clasped one hand over another upon her heart, drawing erect her fine figure into a posture full of indignant reproach and passionate deprecation. Indeed, had I never met her before and not known better, I should have taken her to be some fine tragedy actress who could not perform in the humblest article of an every-day commonplace part without dressing her behaviour with the airs of the stage.

'Pardon me,' I exclaimed, 'you mistake. I meant nothing significant. I thought you would wish to know if your husband had been spared. This is no moment for discussing any other question in the world but how we are to deliver ourselves from this terrible situation.'

As I turned to leave them I thought she regarded me with entreaty, almost with wistfulness, if such eyes as hers could ever take that expression, but she remained silent; and giving my love a smile—for my love she was now, and I cannot express how my heart went to her as she stood pale, worn, heavy-eyed, but lacking

nothing of her old tenderness and sweetness and fairness by the side of her sister, listening timidly to the haughty, commanding creature's words—I walked to meet Cutbill, who was slowly returning from his inspection of the bodies.

‘They’re all dead, sir,’ he exclaimed.

‘Ah!’ I cried.

‘There’s poor old Mr. Crimp——’ his voice failed him; he added a little later, ‘they look more to have been killed than drowned, sir.’

‘Sir Wilfrid?’

‘No, he isn’t amongst them.’

We stood together looking towards the bodies.

‘Cutbill,’ said I, ‘we must all turn to now and collect what we can from the wreck that may prove useful to us. There’s nothing to eat here saving dead fish which will be rotting presently.’

The sea stretched in lead under the lead of the sky saving in the far east, where the opening of the heavens there had shed a pearly film upon it bright with sunrise. The swell had flattened and was light, and rolled sluggishly to the island, sliding up and down the smooth incline soundlessly, save when now and again some head of it broke and boiled and rushed backwards white and simmering. I sent a long look round, but

there was nothing in sight. One could follow the ocean girdle sheer round the island with but the break only of the queer rugged mass of rock in the centre where the slope came to its height. The line of shore which the remains of the yacht centred was a stretch of some hundred and fifty feet of porous rock like meerschaum in places, the declivity very gradual. It was covered with wreckage, and remains of the vessel continued to be washed ashore by the set and hurl of the swell.

I went to work with Cutbill to haul high and dry whatever we were able to deal with. We were presently joined by two of the sailors. Finn and the other man made an effort to approach, but I perceived they were too weak and would be of no use to us, and I called to them to continue resting themselves. Laura and Lady Monson were seated together and watched us. I could not gather that they conversed; at least though I often directed a glance at them I never observed that they looked at each other as people do who talk.

We toiled a long hour, and in that time had stacked at a good distance from the wash of the sea a store of articles of all kinds: casks of flour, salt beef, biscuit for forecastle use, a cask of sherry, some cases of potted meats, and other matters

which I should only weary you by cataloguing. Had the shore been steep to we should probably have got nothing, but it shelved gently far past the point where the yacht had struck, and as the goods had floated out of the yacht they were rolled up like pebbles of shingle by the swell till they stranded; and as I have said, even as we were busy in collecting what we wanted other articles came washing towards us. Every cask and barrel that was recoverable we saved for the sake of the drink it might contain. Amongst other things we succeeded in dragging high and dry the yacht's foresail. This was a difficult job, for first it had to be cut from the gear that held it to its wreck of spar, and then we had to haul it ashore, which was as much as the four of us could manage. We also saved the yacht's chest of tools, a box of Miss Laura's wearing apparel, and a small chest of drawers which had stood in my poor cousin's cabin. Cutbill and another seaman who stood the firmest of the rest of us on their shanks had to wade breast high before we could secure many of these goods which showed in the hollow of the swell but were too heavy to be trundled further up by the heave of the water, whose weight was fast diminishing. There was little risk, but it took time; plenty of rope had come ashore, and we secured lines to the men

whilst they carried ends in their hands to make fast to the articles they went after. Then they waded back to us and the four of us hauled together, and in this way, as I have said, we saved an abundance of useful things.

There was plenty yet to come at, but we were forced to knock off through sheer fatigue. Our next step was to get some breakfast. I was very eager that poor Finn and the man that was lying near him should be rallied, and counted on a substantial meal and a good draught of wine going far towards setting them on their legs again.

‘Cutbill,’ said I, ‘whilst I overhaul the stores for breakfast, will you take Dowling,’ referring to the stronger of the two men who had joined us, ‘and bury those bodies there? They make a terrible sight for the ladies to see. I have not your strength of heart, Cutbill; the handling of the poor creatures would prove too much for me. Yet if you think it unreasonable that I should not assist——’

‘Oh, no, sir! it’s a thing that ought to be done. We shall have to carry ’em t’other side. They may slip into deep water there.’ He called to Dowling, and together they went to the bodies.

The carpenter’s chest was padlocked. Happily I had a bunch of keys in my pocket, one of which

fitted. The chest was liberally furnished; we armed ourselves with chisel and hammers, a gimlet and the like, with which tools we had presently opened all that we needed to furnish us with a hearty repast. We stood casks on end for tables, and boxes and cases served as seats. There were sailors' knives in the tool chest, and we emptied and cleaned a jar of potted meat to use as a drinking vessel. The prostrate seaman, whose name was Johnson, was too weak to rise: so I sent Head to him, this fellow being one of the sailors who had worked with us on the beach, with a draught of sherry, some biscuits and tinned meat, and had the satisfaction of seeing him fall to after he had tossed down the wine. Finn managed to join us, but he ate little and seemed broken down with grief.

There is much that I find hard to realise when I look back and reflect upon the incidents of this wild excursion of which I have done my best to tell you the story; but nothing seems so dream-like as this our first meal upon that newly created spot of sulphurous rock in the deepest solitude of the heart of the mighty Atlantic. The leaden curtain had gradually lifted off the face of the east, leaving a band of white-blue sky there ruled off by the vapour in a line as straight as the horizon. The sun floated clear in it; his

slanting beam had flashed up the waters midway beneath into an azure of the delicate paleness of turquoise; but all the western side lay of a leaden hue yet under the shadow of the immense stretch of almost imperceptibly withdrawing vapour. At one cask sat Laura and Lady Monson. The weak draught of wind kept my sweetheart's golden hair trembling; but Lady Monson's hung motionless upon her back; it made one think of a thunder-cloud when one looked at it and noticed the lightning of her glance as she sent her eyes in a tragic roll from the distant horizon to the fragment of rock and on to the island slope with the great strange bulk of rock nodding, as it seemed, on top; and the corpse-like whiteness of her face was a sort of stare in itself to remind you of the bald, stormy glare you sometimes see in the brow of a tempest lifting sombre and sulkily past the sea line. Finn's eyes clung with drooping lids to the fragment of the 'Bride'; Head reclined near me in a sailor's reckless posture feeding heartily; down on the beach the figures of Cutbill and Dowling were passing out of sight with one or another of their dreadful burthens and then returning. None of us seemed able to look that way.

'All yon wessel's company saving the eight of us *gone!*' exclaimed Finn. 'And she's what?

Look at her. Just the shell of a yacht's head. Oh, my God, Mr. Monson, how terrible sudden things do happen at sea !'

'I never would ha' believed that the "Bride" 'ud tumble to pieces like that though, capt'n,' exclaimed Head.

'Oh, man,' cried Finn, 'the swell lifted and dropped her. Didn't ye feel it? Poor Sir Wilfrid! Mr. Monson, sir—I'd take his place if he could be here.'

'I believe it, Finn. I am sure you would,' I said with a swift glance at Lady Monson, whose head sank as she caught the poor fellow's remark.

'Has this island been thrown up from the very bottom of the sea?' asked Laura.

'From the very bottom of the sea,' I answered, 'and from a depth out of soundings too. It is the head of a mountain of lava created in a flash of fire, and taller, maybe, from base to peak than half-a-dozen Everests one on the top of another.'

'Do not ships sail this way?' said Lady Monson.

'Plenty of them, my lady,' answered Finn. 'No fear of our being long here. A hisland in these waters where it is all supposed to be clear is bound to bring wessels close in to view it. The "'Liza Robbins" oughtn't to be fur off.' He shuddered and cried, 'Poor Jacob Crimp! poor

old Jacob! Gone! and the werry echo of the yarn he was spinning me last night ain't yet off my ears.' He buried his long, rugged face in his hands, shaking his head.

'Is there any means of escaping should a vessel not pass by?' inquired Lady Monson.

'We must pin our faith on being sighted and taken off,' I answered.

'But where are we to live meanwhile? What is there on this horrible spot to shelter us?' she exclaimed with a sudden start and darting a terrified look around her. 'If stormy weather should come, the waves will sweep this island. How shall we be able to cling to it? All our provisions will be washed away. How then shall we live?'

'It'll take a middling sea to sweep this here rock, your ledship,' said Johnson feebly. 'But it is to be swept, capt'n. What's the height o' un?'

'Two fadom end on, I allow,' said Head.

'Silence!' roared Finn, putting the whole of his slender stock of vitality as one should suppose into his shout. 'What d'ye want? to scare all hands by jawing? My lady, there's nothen to be afraid of. It blew strong last night arter the yacht had stranded; but this island wasn't swept or we shouldn't be here.'

I met my sweetheart's frightened eyes, and

to change the subject asked Lady Monson if she had reached the shore unaided.

‘No,’ she answered. ‘I owe my life to the sailor who is with that big seaman down there,’ meaning Dowling. ‘I am unable to explain. I was unconscious before I left the yacht.’

‘Her ladyship was washed overboard,’ said Finn. ‘Dowling, who was swimming, got one of his hands foul of your hair, my lady. He kept hold, towed your ladyship as the swell ran him forrads, felt ground and hauled ye ashore. He behaved well.’

‘My poor maid is drowned!’ cried Laura.

‘Too many, miss, too many! Oh, my God, too many!’ muttered poor Finn.

Meanwhile my eye had been resting incuriously upon the singular lump of rock that stood apparently poised on the highest slope in the very centre of the island. On a sudden I started to a perception that for the instant I deemed purely fanciful. The block of stuff was distant from where we were eating our breakfast some two hundred and eighty to three hundred yards. The complexion of it whilst the sky was in shadow had so much of the meerscham-like tint of the island that one easily took it to be a mass of lava identical with the rest of the volcanic creation; but the sun was now pouring his

brilliant white fires upon it, and I noticed a deal of sparkling in it as though it were coated with salt or studded with flints of crystal, whilst the bed in which it lay and the slope round about were of a dead, unreflecting pale yellow. My fixed regard attracted the attention of the others.

One of the two seamen looked and called out - 'That ain't a part of the island, sir.'

'What form does it take to your fancy?' I asked, addressing my companions generally.

There was a pause and Laura said, 'It looks like a ship, an unwieldy vessel coming at us. Do you notice two erections like broken masts?'

Finn peered under his hand.

'It certainly looks uncommonly like as if it had been a ship in its day,' he exclaimed, 'but these 'ere convulsions, I am told, are made up o' fantastics.'

Cutbill and his companion were now approaching; they were fiery hot, their faces crimson, and they moved with an air of distress. Yet Cutbill made shift to sing out as he approached, pointing as he spoke, 'Mr. Monson, there's a ship ashore up there, sir. You get the shape of her plain round the corner.'

'Come, lads!' I cried, 'sit and fall to. There's plenty to eat here and drink to give you life. You have got well through a bitter

business. Finn, do you feel equal to inspecting that object ?’

‘Ay, sir,’ he answered. ‘I’m drawing my breath better. But it’s the mind, Mr. Monson—it’s the mind.’

‘Then come, all of us who will,’ I cried. ‘Laura, here is my arm for you, and here is a pocket handkerchief too to tie round your head.’

Lady Monson looked at her sister and rose with her. Laura came to my side and we started.

CHAPTER XXX.

WE BOARD THE GALLEON.

THE surface of the island was so honeycombed that one dared not look elsewhere than downwards whilst walking, and so it was not until we had drawn close to the huge rock-like lump that I was able to give my attention to it.

How am I to describe this astonishing body? It was most clearly the petrified fabric of a ship, a vessel of considerable tonnage that had been hove from the dark ocean bed on which it had been resting for God alone could tell how many scores of years by the prodigious eruption that had sent this head of rock on which we stood rushing upwards through the deep into the view of the Atlantic heaven. She had been apparently a galleon in her day, and to judge from such shape as I could distinguish in her, she was probably upwards of a century and a half old. She was not much above three times as long as she was broad, and the figure of her therefore was only to be got by viewing her broadside on. She was encrusted

with shells of a hundred different kinds and colours, with much exquisite drapery of lace-like weed. This shelly covering was manifestly very thick and astonishingly plentiful, but though it increased her bulk it did not greatly distort her shape. You saw the form of the craft plain in the astonishing growth and adhesion. There was the short line of poop and then a little longer line of quarter-deck, then a deep waist broken again by the rise of the forecastle. You could follow the curve of the stem and cutwater and plainly see the square of the counter rising castle-like to a height of hard upon thirty feet from the surface on which she lay. She suggested the structure of a ship built of shells. The remains of a couple of masts shot up from her decks, one far forward, the other almost amidships, each about twelve feet high, as richly clothed as the hull with shells of many hues. She lay with a slight list; that is to say, a little on one side, the inclination being to starboard, and so far as one could guess, she was disconnected from the bed on which she reposed—probably thundered clear of it by the shock of earthquake, though she looked as solid as a block of cliff. Sparkling lines of water spouted from her upper works, but from below that part of her main deck which sailors would call the covering board, she showed herself

as tight as if she had been newly caulked and launched.

The sunshine streamed purely and with great power upon her, and though she had scarce been distinguishable from the rest of the island save in the shape of her when the sky was dark with cloud, she now flashed out on that side of her that faced the sun into the most barbarically glorious, richly coloured, admirably novel object that ever mortal eye lighted upon in this wide world. Pearl coloured shells blended with blue and green; there were ruby stars; growths of a crystalline clarity prismatic as cut glass; shells of the cloud-like softness of milk but of the hardness of marble; patches of encrustation of an amber tint, others of a vivid green delicately relieved by the scoring of the burnished edges of mussel-like shells. The falls of water fell like curves of rainbow over this magnificence and splendour of marine decoration; the tapestry of weed hung moist and of an exquisite vividness of green. The short height of masts glittered in the sunshine with many lovely colours of silver and rose and other hues which made a very prism of each shaft of spar.

The whole of us stood gazing, lost in wonder; then Finn cried, 'This is a wonderful sight, Mr. Monson.'

‘An old galleon full o’ treasure. Who’s to know?’ exclaimed the seaman Head.

‘From what depth will she have been thrown up?’ asked Laura.

‘From a soil too deep for human soundings,’ said I. ‘Wonderful that the blaze of fire in the heart of which she must have soared to this surface did not wither her up. But she seems perfect, not an ornament injured, not a jewel on her broken, no hint of having been scorched that I can anywhere see. She will have belonged to the last century, Finn.’

‘Ay, sir,’ he answered, ‘and mayhap earlier. How would she show if she was to be scraped?’

He held his long chin betwixt his thumb and forefinger, and stared gapingly at the wondrous object.

‘We might find shelter in her,’ said the cold, haughty voice of Lady Monson, ‘if the sea should break over the island.’

‘Happily suggested!’ I exclaimed. ‘What sort of accommodation will her decks offer?’

‘Grit, I reckon,’ said Head.

‘Well, we can pound a space clear for ourselves, I hope,’ said I; ‘there’s canvas enough yonder on the beach to furnish us with a roof.’

‘And she’ll give us a rise of twenty or thirty

feet above the level of the island, sir,' said Finn, 'pretty nigh as good as a masthead lookout. A wessel 'll have to pass a long way off not to see her! Well, thank God! says I, for that she's here. It's something for a man's sperrits to catch hold of, ain't it, Mr. Monson? Lor' bless me, how beautiful them shells look!'

Cutbill and Dowling now joined us, and stood staring like men discrediting their senses.

'William,' said Finn, addressing Cutbill, 'if ye had her safe moored in the Thames, mate, just as she is, there'd be no need for you to go to sea any more. There's folks as 'ud pay a pound a head to view such a hobject.'

'What's inside of her?' said Dowling.

'That's to be found out,' answered Cutbill. 'Smite me, Mr. Monson, sir, if the look-out of exploring of her ain't good enough to stop a man from being in a hurry to get away from here.'

'Will not one of the sailors climb on board,' said Lady Monson, 'that we may know the state of her decks? We shall require a shelter to-night if a ship does not come to-day and take us off,' and she sent her black eyes flashing over the sea-line as she spoke, but there was nothing to be seen.

'How is a man to get aboard?' exclaimed

Dowling ; ‘there’s nought to catch hold of, and sailors ain’t flies.’

‘Pile casks one on top of another,’ said I, ‘and then make a pick-a-back, the lightest hand last. I’ll lend my shoulders.’

Finn shook his head. ‘No need to risk our necks, sir. The bows are the lowest part. Nothen’s wanted but a coil of rope. Dowling, you look about the freshest of us, my lad. Step down where the raffle is, will ’ee, and bring along a length of the gear there.’

The fellow trudged to the beach very willingly. Had he been a merchant sailor pure and simple one might have looked in vain under such conditions for hearty obedience. Mercantile Jack when shipwrecked has a habit of viewing himself as a man freed from all restraint, and instantly privileged by misery to grow mutinous and in all senses obnoxious. But the instincts of the yachtsman come very near to those of the man-of-war’s-man ; and indeed for the matter of that I would rather be cast away with a crew of men who knew nothing of seafaring outside yachting than with a body of blue-jackets—I mean as regards the promise of respectful behaviour.

Presently Dowling returned with a line coiled over his shoulder. In truth, rope enough to rig a mast with, had come ashore with the yards, gaffs,

and booms of the yacht, and the sailor had had nothing to do but to clear away as much line as he wanted and bring it to us. Cutbill took the stuff from him and coiled it down afresh over his fingers as though he were about to heave the lead, then nicely calculating distance and height with his eye he sent the fakes flying lasso fashion sheer over the head of the huge, glittering, fossilised structure where the incrustation forked out in a manner to suggest the existence of what the ancient mariner termed a 'beak,' and the end was caught by Dowling, who had stepped round the bows of the craft to receive it.

'Now up you go, my lad,' shouted Cutbill, and the sailor, who was of a light figure, mounted as nimbly as a monkey, hand over hand; three of us holding on to the rope t'other side to secure it for him. He gained the deck and looked about him with an air of stupid wonder.

'Why, it's a plantation!' he shouted; 'young cork-trees a-spróuting and flowers as big as targets! vegetables right fore and aft, and a dead grampus under the break of the poop!'

'Avast!' bawled Cutbill, 'tarn to and see if the stump of that there foremast is sound.'

The spar was stepped well forward, after the ancient custom, with a slight inclination towards the bow. Dowling made for it with his mouth

open, staring around and looking behind him as he went and treading as though he moved on broken glass. He drew close to the shell-covered shaft that glowed with the tints of a dying dolphin and glittered and coruscated with the richness and variety of dyes beyond imagination to every movement that one made. After briefly inspecting it he sang out: 'Strong enough to moor a line-of-battle ship to, sir!'

'Then make the end of the line fast there,' roared Cutbill.

This was done, and up went the burly salt, puffing and blowing, swinging a crimson visage round to us as he fended himself off the lacerating heads of the shelly armour with his toes. He got over the side, stood staring as the other had, and then, tossing up his hands, shouted down, 'Looks like that piece, capt'n, that's wrote down in the Bible 'bout the Gard'n of Eden. Only wants Adam and Eve, damn *me*! Never could ha' dreamed of such a thing. And it's the bottom of the sea, too. Why, it's worth being drowned if it's all like this down there.'

'Any hatches?' cried Finn.

'Can't see nothen for shells and vegetables.'

'Well, just take a look round, will 'ee, and let's know if there's shelter to be got for the ladies.'

Dowling sang out, 'Main-deck's pretty nigh awash, but there's a raised quarter-deck, and it's dry from the break of it to right aft.'

'She will be full of water,' said I to Finn. 'Why not scuttle her? There are a couple of augers in the carpenter's chest. Is that growth to be pierced, though?'

'Can but try, sir,' he answered.

'Well,' said I, 'one thing is certain. The sun will be standing overhead presently. There's no wind, and we must absolutely contrive to protect the ladies from the pouring heat. There's but one thing to do for the moment, that I can see. We must manage to rig up a sail aboard to serve as an awning. But how are the ladies to be got into her?'

Lady Monson and Laura stood close, listening anxiously.

'Why,' answered Finn, after thinking for a few moments, 'we must rig up a derrick. There's blocks enough knocking about amongst the raffle down there to make a whip with. The consarn'll sarve also to hoist the provisions up by. I allow that if once we get stowed up there, there'll be nothen to hurt us so far as seas goes in the heaviest gale that can come on to blow.'

'I shall be miserable until I am on board,' said Lady Monson. 'It is dreadful to be depen-

dent upon this low rock for one's life. The tide may rise.'

I met Laura's sad and wondering eyes, and divined her thoughts. The instinct of self-preservation was indeed a very powerful development in her ladyship's bosom. Is she not ashamed to let us all see how anxious she is about *her* life, Laura's glance at me seemed to say, after the sufferings and death her behaviour has brought about—her husband drowned, the unhappy man she abandoned her home for floating in the depths beyond the horizon there——?

Cutbill descended, followed by Dowling

'Tis an amazing sight, *surely*,' he exclaimed, wringing the perspiration in a shower from his forehead. 'The decks is flinty hard with shell, but I reckon a space is to be cleared just under the break of the poop, and it feels almost cool up there arter these here rocks. There's a porpoise aft as'll want chucking overboard. 'Tain't no grampus, as Dowling says. Only I tell ye, capt'n, that there deck's a sight to make a man see twenty times more'n he looks at.'

Finn's spirits had improved through his having something else to think of than the loss of the yacht and the drowning of her people. He was fetching his breath too with comparative ease, and only at long intervals brought his hand to

his side. This improvement in him greatly cheered me. I liked the rough, homely sailor much, and his death would have been a blow. The man Johnson had by this time made shift to rise and join us, but he walked with a weak step and looked very sadly, as though a deal of the life had been washed out of him in his struggle to fetch the shore. He was of no use to us, and I told him to go and sit in the shadow of the hull out of the blaze of the sun.

Finn then called a council: Cutbill, myself, Dowling and Head gathered round him, and very briefly and with but little talk we concerted our plans. We were all agreed that the astonishing shell-armoured fabric could be made to yield us a tolerably secure asylum, and that the elevation of its deck would enable us to command a wide view of the sea, and that therefore it was our business forthwith to convey all that we could recover from the yacht into her. I went to work with the rest and toiled hard. The labour mainly consisted in dragging and pulling, for we had to bring a spare boom to the galleon from the beach to serve as a derrick for hoisting; then such sails as had been washed ashore; then the provisions. It was like drawing teeth; everything seemed to weigh about five times more than it should. The work was made the harder

moreover by the character of the ground. Had the surface been smooth as earth is we could have tramped with tolerable briskness ; but our staggering march to the galleon under heavy loads was converted into a very treadmill exercise by our having to dodge the little holes large enough to neatly fit the leg to as high as the knee, or the wider yawns and great wells of which some were big enough to receive the whole body of us, goods and all, in one gulp. I had by this time ascertained that the water in the larger pores and holes was too salt to drink. It was in the smaller hollows only, and these indeed amongst the shallowest, that the water lay scarce brackish. In short, the fall of rain, great as it was, had not lasted long enough to drown the brine in the deeper wells. This was an important discovery, for the fierce sun would soon dry up the shallow apertures ; and had we taken for granted that the contents of the deeper ones were fit to drink, we should have been brought face to face with thirst.

But happily nearly the whole of the yacht lay in piecemeal before us. All that had been in her forepart which yet stood had washed out and rolled ashore or stranded within wading distance. Our fresh water had been carried in casks, as I believe was the custom for the most part in those

days ; some of the barrels had bulged, but a few had been swept high and dry. There were empty water casks, moreover, which had floated up, and these we rolled aside to be filled the moment we had leisure to devote to that task. There were no bodies to be seen and I was thankful for it. The sharks no doubt had been put to flight by the explosion, but they would not be long in returning ; and indeed I gathered they were in force again, though I saw nothing resembling a fin, from the circumstance of none of the dead, saving the few forms which Cutbill and Dowling had slipped into the sea on the other side of the island, having drifted in with the wreckage.

The leaden curtain had drawn far down into the west ; two-thirds of the heavens now were a dazzle of silver blue with a high sun looking down out of it with a roasting eye, and the water a surface of shivering glory south and east and edged crape-like in the west, but not a cloud of the size of a thumb-nail anywhere save there. A thin line of surf purred delicately upon the gradual slope of sulphur-lined beach with a weak, metallic hissing sounding along the length of it as the sparkling ripple slipped up and down upon the honeycombed beach. The remains of the yacht's bows lay gaunt and motionless some distance down. Her gilt figure-head glowed in the sun-

shine and made a brightness under it that rode like a fragment of sunbeam upon the delicate lift of sea rolling inwards. A plank or two rounding into the stern were gone and you could see daylight through her. It seemed incredible that so stout a little craft should have gone to pieces as she had; but then the swell had been heavy and the ground on which she beat iron hard, and then again her scantling was but that of a pleasure vessel, though the staunchest of its kind.

Meanwhile I conveyed, with the help of Cutbill, into the shadow that was cast by the galleon, as I will call her, Laura's box of wearing apparel which we had fallen in with early in the morning. Oddly enough it was the only trunk or portmanteau that had come ashore. Some sailors' chests had floated in, but nothing belonging to any of us aft saving this box of Laura's and a small chest of drawers out of Wilfrid's cabin, one drawer gone, and the others containing articles of no use to us, such as gloves, neck-ties, writing material, manuscripts sodden and illegible. The removing her clothes from the box and spreading them to dry found Laura occupation and something else therefore to think of than our miserable condition. Her sister very early had withdrawn to the shadow cast by the galleon and there sat, Johnson lying a little way from her—apparently stirless for a whole

half-hour together ; as much a fossil to the eye as the wondrous structure that sheltered her. The black cloud of hair upon her back, her spectral white face and dark eyes gave me an odd fancy of her as the figure-head of the mysterious fabric that had risen in thunder and flame from the green stillness of its ocean tomb where it had been lying so long that the mere thought of the years put a shiver into one spite of the broiling orb that hung overhead. Heavens ! I remember thinking in some interval of toil, during which I paused, panting, with my eye directed towards the galleon, figure a lonely man coming ashore here on a moonlit night and beholding that woman seated as she now sits, looking as she now looks, stirless as she now is, in the shadow of that shell-covered structure shimmering like a lunar rainbow to the moonbeam !

It was like passing from death to life to send the gaze from Lady Monson to Laura as the little sweetheart busily flitted from sunshine to shadow, spreading the garments to the light, her hair flashing and fading as she passed from the radiance into the violet shade, her figure the fairer to my enamoured eyes maybe for the shipwrecked aspect of her attire that enriched by fitful and fascinating revelations the beauty of her form by an art quite out of the reach of the nimblest of dressmaking

fingers. Her spirits and much of her strength seemed to have returned to her. Often she would look my way and wave her hand to me.

Half an hour after noon by the sun—for my watch had stopped when I tumbled overboard, and so had Laura's and Lady Monson's—we all assembled under the overhanging counter of the galleon for a midday meal. The sun was almost overhead, and there was very little shadow; which forced us to sit tolerably close together, and I could see that her ladyship did not very much relish this intimate association with the rough sailors; but it was either for her or for them to sit out in the scorching, blinding light, and as she did not offer to go I insisted on the poor fellows keeping their places, though Finn and Cutbill shuffled as though they were for backing away. She perceived my indifference to her sensitiveness and shot a look of hate at me. However, I was not so insensible as she imagined, for I was very careful to scarcely glance at her; for there she sat, unveiled, her head uncovered, close to, to be peered at, if one chose, as if she were a picture or a statue, and I would not pain what weak sense of shame, what haughty confusion there might be in her by a single lift of my eyes to her face, saving when I accosted her or she me. I observed that the sailors were

studious in their disregard of her. There was not a man of them I dare say but would have squinted curiously at her out of the corner of his eyes on board the yacht had she shown herself on deck; but here it would have been taking an unfair advantage of her; their instincts as men governed them, and no fine gentleman could ever have exhibited a higher quality of breeding than did these rough Jacks in this respect, as they squatted munching biscuit and potted meat and handing on to one another the jar of sherry and water.

But often, though swiftly and very respectfully too, their glances would go to Laura. They would look as though they found something to hearten them in her sweet pale face, her kind smile, her pretty efforts to bear up.

‘There ought to be a ship passing here before long,’ said Finn, with a slow stare seawards; ‘’taint as if this here island was right in with the African coast.’

‘The “’Liza Robbins” should be looked out for, capt’n,’ said Cutbill; ‘she was dead in our wake when we drawed ahead, steering our course to a hair.’

‘Strange that all the yacht’s boats should have disappeared,’ said I.

‘Hammered into staves, your honour,’ said Finn; ‘ye may see bits of them on the beach.’

‘I couldn’t swear to it,’ said Johnson languidly; ‘it was so blooming dark; but I’ve got a notion of seeing some of the men run aft when the yacht struck, as though making for one of the boats.’

‘I was knocked down by a rush of several sailors,’ said I.

‘If any of our chaps got away in a boat, why aren’t they here?’ asked Dowling.

‘Why, man, consider the size of this island,’ I exclaimed; ‘a few strokes of the oars, the boat heading out, or to the eastwards, say, would suffice to send them clear of this pin’s-head of rock, and then once to leeward they’d blow away. But we need not trouble to speculate: I fear nobody has escaped but ourselves.’

Finn shook his head with a face of misery, putting down what he was eating and fixing his eyes, that had moistened on a sudden, on the rock he sat on.

‘How long will it be before we enter the ship?’ asked Lady Monson.

‘Oh, we shall all be aboard before sundown, I don’t doubt,’ said I.

‘Will you not have some signal ready in case a vessel pass?’ she demanded.

‘We’ll stack the materials for a bonfire, but there is much to be done meanwhile,’ said I.

I believed she would have addressed Cutbill or Finn rather than me, but for the downright insolence her disregard of my presence would have signified. No doubt she hated me for being her husband’s cousin, for joining in his chase of her, for having helped in the duel that cost the Colonel his life, for the part I had acted aboard the ‘*Liza Robbins*,’ and for being a witness of her defeat and shame and humiliation. Yes, such a woman as Lady Monson would violently abhor a man for much less than this. Why should poor Wilfrid have been drowned and she spared? I remember thinking. The world would surely have been the better off for the saving of one honest heart out of the yacht’s fore-castle than for Lady Monson’s deliverance. But reflections of this kind were absurdly ill-timed. I started from them on meeting Laura’s gaze pensively watching me, and then sprang to my feet to the perception of the overwhelming reality that confronted us all.

‘Come, lads,’ said I, ‘if you are sufficiently rested shall we turn to?’

They instantly rose; Johnson staggered on to his legs, but I told him to keep where he was.

‘You’ll be hearty again to-morrow,’ said I, ‘and we are strong enough to manage without you.’

He knuckled his forehead with a grateful smile and lay down again.

The work ran us deep into the afternoon. There did not seem much to be done, but somehow it occupied a deal of time. The heat was a terrible hindrance; it fell a dead calm, the atmosphere pressed with a tingling vibration to the skin and swam in a swooning way, till sometimes on pausing and bringing my hand to my brow I would see the hot blue horizon beginning to revolve as though it were some huge teetotum with myself perched on the top of the middle of it. With a vast deal of trouble and after a long time a boom was secured to the stump of the galleon's foremast with a block at the end of it, through which a line was rove. There had washed ashore close to the great dead shark down on the beach a small arm-chair of red velvet that had formerly stood in Laura's cabin. Cutbill spied it and brought it to Finn, and said that it would do to hoist the ladies on board by. It was accordingly carried to the galleon, and made fast to one end of the whip. Dowling then climbed on board whilst the others of us stood by to sway away.

‘Will you go up first, Lady Monson?’ said I.

She coldly inclined her head and came to the

chair, sweeping her hair backwards over her shoulders with a white, scared look at the height up which she was to be hoisted. I snugged her in the chair, and passed the end of a piece of line round her, and all being ready, we ran her up hand over hand till she was on a level with the shell-bristling rail of the galleon's forecastle. Here Dowling caught hold of the chair and drew it inboards, singing out to us to lower away, and a few moments after the chair was floating over the side empty.

We then sent Laura aloft. She smiled at me as she seated herself, but there was a deal of timidity in her sweet eyes, and her smile vanished as if by magic the moment the chair was off the ground. However, she soared in perfect safety and was received by Dowling, and no sooner had she sent a look along the decks than her head shone over the side and she called down to me, 'Oh, Mr. Monson, it is exquisite—a very Paradise of shells and sea flowers!'

'Will you go up now, sir?' said Finn.

'Not yet,' I replied; 'I can be useful down here. Let us get Johnson hoisted out of the way first.'

Cutbill brought the poor fellow round to the chair and we sent him up. Dowling remained on the vessel to receive what we whipped up aloft to

him, and in the course of an hour from the time of swaying Lady Monson aboard we had hoisted all the provisions we had brought into the shadow of the galleon—Laura's box of clothes, the yacht's foresail and fore-staysail, a bundle of mattresses that had washed out of the fore-castle, the cask of sherry, two casks of fresh water, the carpenter's chest, and other matters which I cannot now recall. This was, very well indeed, but we were nigh-hand spent and had to fling ourselves down upon the pumice rocks to rest and breathe ere tailing on to the whip again to hoist one or another of us up.

The sun was now in the west, his light a rich crimson and the sea a sheet of molten gold polished as quicksilver under him. The galleon's shadow lay broad on her port side, and in it we sprawled with scarlet faces and dripping brows.

'No chance of being picked up in such weather as this, sir,' said Finn, who had worked as hard as any of us and seemed the better for his labours, though I observed that his breath was caught at times as if by a spasm or shooting pain in the side.

'We must have patience,' said I, 'but at the worst 'tis a tolerably comfortable shipwreck, Finn. We are well stocked, and there's a deal more yet to be had if the sea will keep quiet. We're not

ashore upon the Greenland coast, all ice ahead of us and all famine astern.'

'No, thank the Lord,' quoth Cutbill; 'it's a bad shipwreck when a man daresn't finger his nose for fear of bringing it away from his face. Better too much sun,' says I, 'than none at all.'

'And then again,' said I, with a glance up at the marvellous, shell-encrusted conformation that towered with swelling bilge over our heads; 'here's as good a house as one needs to live in till something heaves in view.'

'I'm for scuttling her at once, capt'n,' cried Head; 'she'll hold a vast o' water, and the sooner she's holed the sooner she'll be empty. Who's to tell what's inside of her?'

Cutbill ran his eyes thirstily over the huge fossil. 'She was a lump of a craft for her day,' said he, 'and when wessels of her size put to sea they was commonly nearly all rich ships, so I've heerd.'

'Head, you're right,' cried Finn. 'Ye shall be the first to spike her—if 'ee can. On deck there!'

'Hillo!' answered Dowling, putting his purple, whiskered face over the line of shells.

'Send down the augers and a chopper out of the carpenter's chest.'

'Ay, ay, sir,' he answered, and in a few moments down came the tools.

‘Before you make a start,’ said I, ‘hoist me aboard, will you?’

I planted myself in the chair, was cleverly run up, got hold of Dowling’s hand and stepped on to the deck.

I was prepared to witness a rich and gorgeous show, but what I now viewed went leagues beyond any imagination I could have conceived of the reality. The ancient fabric had four decks, that is to say, the forecastle, the main-deck that was like a well, a short raised quarter-deck, and abaft all a poop, going to the narrow, castle-like crown of the head of the stern. These decks, together with the inside of the bulwarks, were thickly encrusted with shells of every imaginable hue and shape and size; but in addition there flourished densely amongst these shells a wonderful surface of marine growths, not so dense but that the shells could be seen between, yet plentiful enough to submit each deck to the eye as a glorious marine parterre. It was like entering upon a scene of fairyland; there were growths of a coralline appearance of many colours, from a Tyrian dye to a delicate opalescent azure, huge bulbs like bloated cucumbers, flowers resembling immense daisies, with coral-hard spikes projecting from them like the rays which dart from the sun; long trailing plants like prostrate creepers,

others erect, as tall as my knee, resembling ferns, of a grace beyond all expression, with their plume-like archings, blossoms of white and carnation, green bayonet-like spikes, weeds shaped to the aspect of purple lizards, so that one watched to see if they crawled; great round vegetables, bigger than the African toadstools, some crimson, some of cream colour, some barred with crimson on a yellow ground; here and there lay fish, big and little, of shapes I had never before beheld, whose vividness seemed to have lost nothing through their being dead. Against the front of the quarter-deck was the livid body of a porpoise. There was scarcely a vegetable growth but that might have been wrought of steel for the unyieldingness of it. I kicked at one toadstool-like thing and my foot recoiled as though it had smote a little pillar of iron. The picture was made the more amazing by the red light of the declining sun, for every white gleam had its tinge of ruby, and what was deep of hue glowed gloriously rich. The two shafts of masts sparkled like the jewelled fingers of a woman. And the deep sea smell! The atmosphere was charged with an odour of brine and weed of a pungency and quality that one felt to be possible only to a revelation from some deepest and most secret recess of the deep. The water that had covered

the main-deck when Dowling and Cutbill had first inspected the craft was fast draining away, but the growths there and the shells were still soaked and gave a wet surface for the light of the sun to flash up in, and the whole space sparkled with the glory of the rainbow, but so much brighter than the brightest rainbow, that the eye, after lingering, came away weeping with the dazzle.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE FIRST NIGHT.

LAURA and her sister sat on one of the sailors' chests that we had sent up; Johnson leaned on top of a flour or biscuit barrel that stood on end, with his eyes fixed upon the western sea. There was still a deal of bright curiosity in Laura's face as her gaze ran over the deck, resting again and again with a sparkle in it upon some lovely fibrine form, some lily-like sea flower, some plant as of green marble; but Lady Monson's countenance was listless and almost empty of expression. Any astonishment she might have felt was exhausted. I had scarce time after being swayed inboards to take even a swift view of this glittering miracle before she asked me, in a voice cold and commanding, yet, I am bound to say, of beauty too—some of the notes soft almost as a flute's—
'When will the men spread the sail as an awning, Mr. Monson? They should prepare for the night. Darkness speedily comes when the sun is gone; and we are without lights.'

‘The men have worked very well, Lady Monson,’ said I. ‘They will rig up a sail promptly for you, I am sure. I am not in command of them, as of course you know, but they have attended cheerfully to many of my suggestions. They were your husband’s servants, madam.’

‘And therefore *mine*, if you put it so,’ she answered with an angry flash of her eyes at me.

‘I have no doubt,’ said I, ‘that they will be willing to do anything you may desire,’ and with that I stepped to the side to see what they were about, with so strong an aversion in me that I could only heartily hope it would never betray me into any more defined expression of it than mere manner might convey.

Laura came to my side as though to observe with me what the men were about and whispered, ‘She is very trying, Mr. Monson, but bear with her. It will not need a long imprisonment of this kind to tame her.’

‘My dearest,’ said I, ‘I have not a word to say against her. My quarrel is with *you*.’ She stared at me. ‘I call you Laura. Again and again last night you let me tell you I loved you. By your own admission I am your sweetheart, and yet you call me *Mr. Monson*.’

‘Oh, I will call you Charles ; I never thought of it !’ she exclaimed, blushing rosy. ‘What are

the men doing ? ' she exclaimed, peering as though engrossed by the movements of the seamen.

Cutbill was winding away at the shell-thickened side of the galleon with an auger ; further aft stood Head similarly employed. On a line with my face as I looked down there was a finger-thick coil of water spouting out of the vessel's side, smoking upon the rocks and streaming away in a rivulet into holes which it overflowed. I explained to Laura the fellows' employment.

' They have a notion,' said I, ' that there may be treasure contained in the hold of this old galleon, but before they can search they must empty her of the water she is full of. Below there ! ' I called.

Finn looked up. ' I see that you have bored through her,' said I. ' Is her side hard ? '

' As stone, sir,' he answered. ' The shells come away pretty easy, but her timber's growed into regular iron.'

I asked him how many holes they were going to pierce. He answered three, that she might be draining handsomely through the night.

' The sooner we can rig up a sail, Finn, to serve as a shelter, the better,' I called down to him. ' When the sun is gone there'll be nothing to see by. The men will be wanting their supper too ; then there's that lump of a porpoise to be got

out of the craft, for we don't want to be poisoned as well as shipwrecked, and if daylight enough lives after all this,' I continued, 'we ought to beach high and dry as much as we can come at to-night that may be washing about out of the yacht down there, in case it should come on to blow. There's no moving on this island for the holes in it when the darkness falls.'

'Ay, ay, sir, we'll be with ye in a jiffy,' he answered.

'What think you of this marine show?' I said to Laura.

'It is too beautiful to believe real. The mermaids have made a garden of this ship. How lovingly, with what exquisite taste have they decorated these old decks!'

'Happy for us,' I exclaimed, 'that the earthquake should have struck her fair and brought her, be-flowered and be jewelled as she is, to the surface. She is more than an asylum. She compels our attention and comes between us and our thoughts and fears.'

'Would she float, do you think, if all the water were to be let out of her?'

'I would not stake a kiss from you, Laura, on it, but unless she is full of petrified cargo and ocean deposit, stones, shells, and so on, I don't

see why she shouldn't swim, though she might float deep.'

'Imagine if we could launch her and save our lives by her!' cried Laura, clasping her hands; then changing her voice and casting down her eyes she added: 'I must go to Henrietta. She watches me intently. She wonders that I can smile, I dare say, and I wonder too when I think for an instant. Poor Wilfrid! poor Wilfrid! and my maid too, and the others who are lying dead in that calm sea.'

She moved away slowly towards her sister.

I looked about me for a fore-castle or main-deck hatch or any signs of an entrance into the silent interior under foot, but the crust of shells and the grass and plants and vegetation concealed everything. Both the front of the poop and that of the short raised quarter-deck seemed inlaid with shells like a grotto. There was doubtless a cabin 'under the poop with probably a door off the quarter-deck, and windows in the cabin-front to be come at by beating and scraping. It might furnish us with a shelter, but how would it show? What apparel had the sea clothed it with? An emotion of deep awe filled and subdued me when I looked at this ship. I was sufficiently well acquainted with old types of craft to guess the century to which this vessel had belonged, and even

supposing her to have been one of the very last of the ships of her particular build and shape, yet even then I might make sure that she could not be of a less age than a hundred and twenty or thirty years, so that I might safely assume that she had been resting in the motionless dark-green depths of this ocean for above a hundred years. She had been a three-masted vessel, but all traces of her mizen-mast had vanished. Her figure made one think of a tub, the sides slightly pressed in. All about her bows was so thickly encrusted with shells that it was impossible to guess the character of the structure there. I traced the outline of a beak or projection at the stem head with a hollow betwixt it and the fore part of the fore-castle deck. Little more was to be gathered, for all curves and outlines here were thickened into grotesque bigness of round and surface out of their original proportions and shape by deposits of shells. Indeed the well in the head was choked with marine vegetation. It was like a square of tropic soil loaded with the eager growths of a fat and irresistible vitality, appearances as of guinea grass, wondrous imitations of tufts of rushes, beds of pink and feathering mosses, star blossoms, thickets of delicate filaments, gorgeous heads in velvet, snake-like trailings, sea-roses, dark satin masses of plants of a crimson colour, and a hundred other

such things, with a subsoil of shells whose dyes glanced through the growth in gleams of purple and orange and pearl and apple-green, in shapes of mitres, harps, volutes, and so forth.

The men now arrived on board ; three holes had been pierced in the galleon's side, and the water hissed with a refreshing sound on to the rocks intermingled with the faint lipping of the brine that was slowly filtering down the sides from the main-deck. Finn's first directions were to make an awning of the stay-foresail. The canvas had long ago dried out into its original whiteness, so fiery had been the heat of the sun and so ardent the temperature of this porous island. The sail was easily spread. The stump of the foremast, as I have before said, was close into the head ; the sparkling shaft served as an upright for the head of the sail to be seized to, and the wide foot of it, shelving like the roof of a house, was secured to the bows. For that night, at all events, we chose the fore-castle to rest on, partly because we happened to be on it and our provisions were stocked there, and next because the main-deck was still almost awash ; and then again there was the great porpoise to get rid of, and, in truth, until one could force an entrance into the craft it mattered little at which end of her one lay.

The sun still floated about half an hour above the sea. I had again and again looked yearningly around the firm, light-blue ocean line, but the azure circle ran flawless to either hand the wedge of dark-red gold that floated without a tremble in the dazzle of it under the sun.

‘Nothing can show in this here calm, sir,’ said Finn, as I brought my eyes away from the sea. ‘No use expecting of steam, and what’s moved by wind ain’t going to hurry itself this weather, sir.’

‘Let’s get supper,’ said I. ‘There should be starlight enough anon, I think, Finn, to enable us to fill a couple of the empty casks with the sweetest of the water that we can find in those holes.’

‘It can be managed, I dorn’t doubt,’ said he.

‘These here chests, capt’n,’ exclaimed Cutbill, indicating the three sailors’ boxes that we had hoisted aboard, ‘belonged to O’Connor, Blake, and Tom Wilkinson. How do we stand as consarns our meddling with ’em?’

‘How d’ye suppose, William?’ answered Finn. ‘Use ’em, man, use ’em.’

‘Hain’t the dead got no rights?’ inquired Dowling.

‘Ay, where there’s law, mate,’ responded Finn with a half grin at me; ‘but there’s no law

on the top crust of an airthquake, and I allow that whatever may come to us in such a place is ourn to do what we like with.'

'Oh, certainly,' I cried; 'who the deuce wants to discuss the subject of law and dead men's rights *here*? Overhaul those chests, Dowling, and use whatever you want that you may find in them.'

But one saw the mariner's prejudices in the way in which the sailors opened and inspected the contents of the boxes. Had they had the handling of a portmanteau of mine or a trunk belonging to Wilfrid they might not have shown themselves so sensitive; but these were the chests of dead shipmates and messmates, of men they had gone aloft with, eaten and drank with, skylarked and enjoyed sailors' pleasure with, and I saw they felt that they were doing a sort of violence to fore-castle traditions by handling the vanished Jacks' little property without the sort of right to do so which on board ship they would have obtained by a sale of articles at the mast. However, they found tobacco and pipes, which went far towards reconciling them towards Finn's theory of appropriation. They also met with shoes, which were an unspeakable comfort to Dowling and Head, who were barefooted and in torture with every step they took from the sharp edges and points of

shells. There were rude articles of clothing too, which, when dried would give the men a shift.

Well, we got supper, and when the meal was ended, there being yet a little space of daylight in the west, Cutbill, Dowling, and Head went to the beach to roll empty water-casks near to the galleon for filling with such water as we could find that was least brackish, and to drag clear of the wash of the sea any further casks and cases of provisions, wine and the like, which they might chance to come across. Johnson continued too feeble to be of use. We had three mattresses already as dry as if they had never touched salt water, and one of them I unrolled and made the poor creature lie upon it. Then Finn and I went about to prepare for the night whilst we could still see. We stretched the gaff foresail over the plants and shrubs, placed the other two mattresses on one side of it, covering them with a portion of the sail cloth that the ladies might have clean couches, and made a roll of the sail at the head of these mattresses to serve as a bolster. Tough as the growth of plants on the deck was, stiff as steel as I had thought at first, they proved brittle for the most part to rough usage, and were speedily broken by our tramping and stamping so as to form a sort of mattress under the sail, and we were grateful enough when by-and-by we came to lie

down for the intervention of these petals and leaves and bulbs between our bones and the flint-like surface of the shells as barbed and jagged as though formed of scissors and thumbscrews.

The sun sank and the darkness of the evening swept over the sea as swiftly as the shadow of a storm, but it proved a glorious dusk, fine, clear, glittering though dark, the sky like cloth of silver, flashful in places with a view of the cross of the southern hemisphere low down to make one contrast this heat and stillness and placid grandeur of constellations with the roaring of Cape Horn and the rush of the mountain-high surge, down upon which that divinely planted symbol was gazing with trembling eyes. Nothing sounded save the plashing of the fountains of water spouting from the sides of the galleon and the soft, cat-like breathing of the black line of sea sliding up and down the beach.

The men had made short work of filling the casks ; and leaving them where they stood for the night, had clambered afresh to the forecandle. It was now too dark to deal with the porpoise ; so we agreed to let the great thing rest till the morning. I and one or two of the others had tinder boxes, and the means therefore of procuring a light, but we were without candles or lantern. This was a hardship in the absence of the moon that rose so

late as to be worthless to us and that would be a new moon presently without light; though if I thought of *that* it was only to hope in God's name that the rise of the silver paring would find us safe on board some ship homeward bound.

We were unable to distinguish more of one another than the vague outlines of our figures, and this only against the stars over the crested height of bulwark, for the sail we had spread as an awning deepened the gloom; the growths on the galleon's decks were black, and the shadows lay very thick to the height of the rail where the spangled atmosphere glistened to the edge of the stretched sail overhead. The faces of Laura and her sister showed in a dream-like glimmer. Finn and I had made a little barricade of casks, cases and the like, betwixt the mattresses on which the ladies were to lie, and the other part of the fore-castle that they might enjoy the trifling privacy such an arrangement as this could furnish them with. The men formed into a group round about the mattress where Johnson lay, and lighted the pipes which they had been fortunate enough to meet with in the seamen's chests. As they sucked hard at the bowls the glowing tobacco would cast a faint coming and going light upon their faces. They subdued their voices out of respect to us, and their tones ran along in a half-

smothered growl. Much of their talk was about the yacht, her loss, their drowned mates and the like. I sat beside Laura, with Lady Monson seated at a little distance from her sister, and we often hushed our own whispers to listen to the men. Their superstitions were stirred by their situation. This galleon lay under the stars, a huge looming mystery, vomited but a little while since from the vast depths of yonder black ocean; and now that the night had come her presence, her aspect, the stillness in her of the hushed, un conjecturable, fathomless liquid solitude out of which she had been hurled, stirred them to their souls. I could tell that by the superstitious character of their talk. They told stories of their drowned ship-mates' behaviour on the preceding day—repeated remarks to which nothing but death could give the slightest significance. Johnson in a feeble voice from his mattress said that O'Connor half an hour before the yacht struck told him that he felt very uneasy, and that he'd give all he owned if there were a Roman Catholic priest on board that he might confess to him. He had led a sinful life and he had made up his mind to give up the sea and to find work if he could in a religious house. 'I thought it queer,' added Johnson in accents so weak that they were painful to listen to, 'that a chap like that there O'Connor, who

was always a-bragging and a-grinning and joking, should grow troubled with his conscience all on a sudden. Never knew he was a Papish till he got lamenting that there warn't a priest aboard to confess to.'

'Mates,' said Finn, whose voice sounded hollow in the darkness, 'when death's a-coming for a man he'll often hail him, sometimes a good bit afore he arrives. The sperrit has ears, and it's them that hears him, men. O'Connor had heard that hail, but only the secret parts in him onderstood it, and they set him a commiserating of himself for having lived sinfully, and started him on craving for some chap as he at all events could reckon holy, t'whom he could tell how bad he'd been? Though what good the spinning of a long yarn about his hevil ways into an old chap's ear was going to do him, I'm not here to explain.'

Then Cutbill had something to tell of poor old Jacob Crimp, and Head of a shipmate whose name I forget. But they rumbled away presently from depressing topics into the more cheerful consideration of the contents of the galleon's hold. I sat hand in hand with Laura listening.

'This time yesterday,' said I, 'the cabin of the "Bride" was a blaze of light. I see the dinner table sparkling with glass and silver, the rich

carpet, the elegant hangings, the lustrous glance of mirrors. What is there that makes life so dreamlike and unreal as the ocean? The reality of one moment is in a breath made a vision, a memory of in the next. The noble fabric of a ship melts like a snowflake, and her people vanish as utterly as though they had been transformed into spirits.'

'Fire will destroy more completely than the ocean!' exclaimed Lady Monson.

'I think not,' said I; 'fire leaves ashes, the sea nothing.'

'To the eye,' said Lady Monson.

'This time to-morrow we may be sailing home, Charles,' said Laura.

'Heaven grant it! Give me once more, Laura, the pavements of Piccadilly under my feet, and I believe there is no man in all England eloquent enough to persuade me that what we have undergone from the hour of our departure in the "Bride" to the hour of our return in the whatever her name may prove actually happened.'

'But *I* am real,' she whispered, and I felt her hand tremble in mine.

I pressed her fingers to my lips. Had Lady Monson been out of hearing I should have known what to say. I tried to put a cheerful face upon our perilous and extraordinary position, but I

found it absolutely impossible to talk of anything else than our chances of escape, how long we were to be imprisoned, Wilfrid's death, the destruction of the yacht, incidents of the voyage, and the like. I spoke freely of these matters, caring little for Lady Monson's presence. One of the men in talking with the others said something about the 'Eliza Robbins,' and Laura, turning to her sister, exclaimed :

'I hope some other ship may take us off. How could you have endured such a horrid atmosphere, Henrietta, even for the short time you lived on board her?'

But to this her ladyship deigned no reply ; her silence was ominous, full of wrath. I can imagine that she abhorred her sister at that moment for recalling that ship, and the infamous withering memories which the mere utterance of the name carried with it. She rose as though to go to the galleon's side, but sat again after the first stride, finding the deck with its slippery and cutting shells and its tripping interlacery of growths too ugly a platform to traverse in the dark. I had hoped that she would break through the husk of sulkiness, haughtiness, selfishness with which she had sheathed herself for such comfort as Laura might have obtained from some little show in her sister of geniality and

humanity and sympathetic perception of the dire disaster that had befallen us. There was indeed a time that evening when I believed her temper was mending; for during some interval of our listening to the conversation of the sailors Laura spoke of Muffin, of the horror and fear that had possessed him that night of the severe squall when I found him on his knees, his detestation of the sea, his eagerness to get home, his tricks to terrify Wilfrid into altering the yacht's course, and how the poor wretch's struggles in that way seemed now justified by his being drowned, 'so much so,' added Laura, 'that I cannot bear to think of the unfortunate fellow having been whipped by the men.'

On hearing this, Lady Monson began to ask questions. Apparently she had been ignorant until now that Muffin was on board the 'Bride.' Naturally, she perfectly well remembered him, for the man was her husband's valet some time before she ran off with the Colonel. Her inquiries led to Laura telling her of the tricks that Muffin had played. The girl's voice faltered when she spoke of the phosphoric writing on the cabin wall.

'What words did Muffin write?' asked Lady Monson.

'Oh, Henrietta!' exclaimed Laura, who paused

to a tremulous sigh, and then added, 'He wrote, "*Return to baby.*"'

I might have imagined there would be something in this to have silenced her ladyship for a while, but apparently there was as little virtue in thoughts of her child to touch her as in thoughts of her husband. She asked coldly, but in a sort of dictatorial, pressing way, as though eager to scrape over this mention of her child as you might crowd sail on your ship to run her into deep water off a shoal on which her keel is hung : 'This Muffin was a ventriloquist too, you say?'

I could guess how grieved and shocked Laura was by the tone of her answer. She told her sister how the valet had tricked us with his voice, how he had been sent forward into the fore-castle to work as a sailor, and how the men had punished him on discovering that it was he who terrified them. Several times Lady Monson broke into a short laugh, of a music so rich and glad that one might easily have imagined such notes could proceed only from a very angel of a woman. I did not doubt that she sang most ravishingly, and as her laughter fell upon my ear in the great shadow of that galleon with the narrow breadth of star-clad sky twinkling with blue and green and white-faced orbs, there arose before me the vision of her ladyship seated at the piano with the gallant

Colonel Hope-Kennedy turning the pages of the music for her, and sweet, true, unsuspecting little Laura listening well pleased, and my poor, half-witted cousin maybe up in the nursery playing with his baby.

However, as I have said, this was but a short burst on Lady Monson's part. Laura's reference to the 'Eliza Robbins' silenced her; then Laura and I fell still, her hand in mine, and we listened to the men, who were talking of the galleon, and arguing over the state and contents of her hold.

'Well, treasure ain't perishable anyhow,' said Cutbill.

'That's all right,' answered Finn, whose deep sea voice I was glad to hear had regained something of its old heartiness. 'Gold's gold whether it's wan or wan thousand years old. But what I says is, bar *treasure*, as ye calls it, which 'ee may or may not find—and I hope ye may, I'm sure—there ain't nothen worth coming at in the inside of a wessel that was founded, quite likely as not, afore George the Fust was born.'

'But take a cargo of wine,' said Dowling. 'I've been told that these here galleons was often chock ablock with wines and sperrits of fust rate quality. The longer 'ee keep wine the more valuable it becomes.'

'If there's nought but wine,' said Cutbill,

‘better put on a clean shirt, mate, and tarn in. There’ll be nothen in any cask under these here hatches that worn’t have become salt water after all them years. Dorn’t go and smile in your dreams to the notion, that there’ll be anything fit to drink below.’

‘How long’s she going to take to drain out, I wonder?’ said Head.

‘I allow she’ll be empty by the time you’ve lifted the hatches,’ answered Finn; ‘that’ll be a job to test the beef in ’ee, lads.’

‘Well,’ cried Dowling, ‘there’ll be no leaving this here island, as far as I’m consarned, till the old hooker’s been overhauled. Skin me, capt’n, if there mayn’t be enough aboard to set a man up ashore as a gentleman for life, and here sits a sailor as wants what he can get. I’ve lost all my clothes and a matter of three pun fifteen on top of them. Blarst the sea, says I!’

‘Belay that,’ growled Cutbill; ‘recollect who’s a listening onto ye.’

‘How long’s this island going to remain in the road?’ asked Head; ‘do it always mean to stop here? They’ll have to put a lighthouse upon it.’

‘Likely as not, it’ll go down just as it came up,’ answered the sick voice of Johnson.

Laura started. ‘*That* may not be an idle fancy, Charles,’ she whispered.

‘Do you think this hulk would float, captain,’ I called out, ‘if the head of this rock were to subside, as Johnson yonder suggests?’

‘Well, she ain’t buried, sir!’ he exclaimed; ‘there’s nothen to stop her from remaining behind, that I can see, if she’s buoyant enough to swim. If she’s pretty nigh hollow she’ll do it, I allow; for look at the shape of her. As there’s a chance of such a thing, then when she’s done draining, we’d better plug the holes we’ve made.’

‘I’ll see to that,’ said Dowling; ‘there’s no leaving of her with me till I’ve seen what’s inside of her.’

Here Head delivered a yawn like a howl.

‘It will be proper to keep a look out, I suppose, sir,’ said Finn.

‘Why, yes,’ I answered; ‘the night is silent enough now, but there may come a breeze of wind at any minute and bring along a ship, and one pair of eyes at least must be on the watch.’

‘There’s nothen aboard to make a flare with,’ said Cutbill; ‘a pity. This here’s a speck of rock to miss a short way off in the dark.’

‘It cannot be helped,’ I exclaimed; ‘we have all of us done a hard day’s work since dawn, and there is always in a miserable business of this sort some job or other that must be kept waiting. There’s plenty of stuff on the beach to

collect to-morrow. As for to-night, a breeze may come, as I have said, but mark how hotly those stars burn. There'll be but little air stirring, I fear.'

'There are four of us to keep a look-out, lads,' said Finn.

'Five,' I interrupted; 'I'm one of you. I'll stand my watch!'

'Very good, sir,' said Finn. 'An hour and a half apiece. That'll bring us fair on to day-break.'

'There ain't no timepiece aboard that's going,' said Head; 'how's a man to know when his watch's up?'

'Well, damn it, ye must guess,' growled Cutbill sulkily and sleepily.

'I'm the least tired of you all, I believe,' said I; 'so with your good leave, lads, I'll keep the first look-out.'

This was agreed to; the men knocked the ashes out of their pipes, and, with a rough call of 'good-night' to the ladies and myself, lay down upon the sail.

They occupied the port side of the galleon's forecastle, and made a little huddle of shadows upon the faintness of the canvas, well apart from where the mattresses for the ladies had been placed. Indeed, as you will suppose, the gaff

foresail of a schooner of the dimensions of the 'Bride' provided a plentiful area of sail-cloth, and the space between the ladies and the sailors could have been considerably widened yet, had the main-deck been dry enough to use.

'Where am I to lie?' demanded Lady Monson.

'Your sister, I am sure, will give you choice of either mattress,' said I. 'These casks and cases will keep you as select as though they were the bulkhead of a cabin.'

'A dreadful bed!' she cried. 'How long is it possible for these horrors to last? I am without a single convenience. There is not even a looking-glass. To be chased and hunted down to *this*!' she added in a voice under her breath, as though thinking aloud, whilst her respiration was tremulous with passion.

'I wish the deck was fit to walk on,' said Laura; 'I do not feel sleepy. I should like to walk up and down with you, Charles.'

'It would be worse than pacing a cabbage field, my dear,' said I. 'You are worn out, but will not know it until your head is pillowed. Let me see you comfortable.'

She at once rose, went to the mattress that was nearest the vessel's side, and seated herself upon it, preparatory to stretching her limbs.

‘I should like that bed,’ said Lady Monson. ‘I suffer terribly from the heat. Your blood runs more coldly than mine, Laura.’

‘Either bed will do for me, Henrietta,’ answered the girl, with a pleasant little laugh, and she stepped on to the other couch, and stretched herself along it.

I turned the edge of the sail over her feet, saw that the roll of the canvas made a comfortable bolster for her, and tenderly bidding her good-night, crossed to the other side of the deck, leaving to Lady Monson the task of adjusting her own fine figure, and of snuggling herself according to her fancy. It was about nine o’clock by the stars. Now that the men had ceased speaking, and the hush as of slumber had descended upon this galleon, I cannot express how mysterious and awful was the stillness. You heard nothing but the cascading of the water from the holes in the vessel’s side, a soft fountain-like hissing sound, and the stealthy, delicate seething of the sea slipping up and down the honeycombed beach. The men at a little distance away breathed heavily in the deep slumber that had swiftly overtaken them. Once Johnson spoke in a dream, and his disjointed syllables, amid that deep ocean serenity, grated harshly on every nerve. The heavens overhead were

blotted out by the stretched space of canvas, but aft the line of the galleon rose, broken and black, against the stars which floated in clouds of silver in the velvet dusk of the sky. The silence seemed like some material thing, creeping, as though it were an atmosphere, to this central speck of rock, out of the remote glistening reaches of the huge circle of the horizon.

But deeper than any silence that could reign betwixt the surface of the earth and the stars was the stillness of the bottom of the ocean that had risen with this galleon, the dumbness which filled the blackness of her stonified interior. Imagination grew active in me as I sent my sleepless eye over the sombre, mysterious loom of the ship to where the narrow deck of the poop went in a gentle acclivity, cone-shaped, to the luminaries which glanced over the short line of her taffrail like the gaze of the spectres of her crew, who would presently be noiselessly creeping over the sides. I figured, and indeed beheld, the ship in the days of her glory, her sides a bright yellow, the grim lips of little ordnance grinning through portholes, the flash of brass swivel-guns upon the line of her poop and quarter-deck rail, her canvas spreading on high, round, spacious, flowing and of a lily-white brightness, enriched by flaring pennants, many ells in length, with

figures aft and forward, Spanish ladies in gay and radiant attire, their black eyes shining, their long veils floating on the tropic breeze, grave señors in plumed hats, rich cloaks half draping the sheaths of jewel-hilted swords, a priest or two, shaven, sallow, with a bead-like pupil of the eye in the corner of the sockets ; the pilot and the captain pacing yonder deck together, and where I was standing, crowds of quaintly-apparelled mariners with long hair and chocolate cheeks, yet with roughest voices rendered melodious by utterance of the majestic dialects of their country—and then I thought of her resting, as I now beheld her, motionless in the tideless, dark green waters at the bottom of the ocean !—figures of her people, lying, sitting, standing round about her in the attitudes they were drowned in, preserved from decay by the petrifying stagnation of the currentless dark brine.

It was now that I was alone, the deep breathing of sleepers rising from the deck near me, the eyes of my mind quickened by high-strung imagination into perception, vivid as actuality itself, of the visions of this galleon in her sunlit heyday and then in her glory of shells and plants in the unimaginable hush of the fathomless void from which she had emerged, that I fell to thinking gravely and wonderingly over what Johnson, the

sick sailor, had said touching the possibility of this island's sudden disappearance. Of such volcanic upheavals as this I had read and heard again and again. Sometimes the land thus created stood for years; sometimes it vanished within a few hours of its formation.

I particularly recollected a story that I had met with in the 'Naval Chronicle'; how two ships were in company off a height of land rising sixty feet above the level of the sea, that was uncharted and unknown to the captains of the vessels, though one of them had been in those waters a few weeks before and both men were intimately well-acquainted with the navigation of that tract of ocean; how after masters and crews had been staring, lost in wonder at the tall, pale, sterile, sugar-loaf acclivity, one of the commanders sent a boat over in charge of his mate, that he might land and return with a report; when, whilst the boat was within a long musket-shot of the island, the land sank softly but swiftly without noise, and with so small a commotion of the sea following the disappearance of the loftiest point of peak, that the darkening of the surface of the ocean with ripples there seemed as no more than the shadow of a current.

This and like yarns ran in my head, and indeed the more I thought of it the more I seemed

to fancy that this head of pumice upon which the galleon was seated was of the right sort to crumble down flat all in a minute. Why, think of the height of it! Since those times I believe the plummet has sounded the depths of that part of the equinoctial waters, but in those days the ocean there was held unsearchable. Was it all lava that had been spewed up? some mountain of volcanic vomit, hardened by the brine into an altitude of many thousands of feet from ooze to summit; and hollow as a drum, too, with a mere film of crust on top? Oh God, I mused, wrung from head to foot with a shudder; think of this crust yielding, letting the galleon sink miles down the gigantic shaft of porous stuff, the walls on top yet standing above the water-line, high enough to prevent the sea from rolling into the titanic funnel! Gracious love! figure our being alive when we got to the bottom, and looking up at the mere star of daylight that stared down upon us from the vast distance as the galleon grounded on a bottom deeper than the seat of the hell of the mediæval terrorists!

I shook my head; such a fancy was like to drive me mad—with the sort of possibility of it, too, in its way. Could I have but stirred my stumps I might have been able to walk off something of my mood of horror, but every pace along

that deck was like wading and floundering. I went to the high fore-castle rail and leaned my arms upon it and looked into the night, and presently the beauty and the serenity and the wide mystery of the dark ocean brimming to the wheeling stars worked in me with the influence of a benediction; my pulse slackened and I grew calm. What could the worst that befel us signify but death? I reflected; and I thought of my cousin sleeping in the black void yonder. The splashing of the water streaming from the holes in the side sounded refreshingly upon the ears. There was a suggestion as of caressing in the tender noise of the dark fingers of the sea blindly and softly pawing the incline of the beach. The atmosphere was hot, but the edge of its fever was blunted by the dew.

Thus passed the time, and when I thought my hour-and-a-half had gone I stepped quietly over to Finn and shook him, and with a sailor's promptitude he sprang to his feet, understanding, dead as his slumber had been, our situation and arrangements the instant he opened his eyes. My mind was full, nor was I yet sleepy, and I could have talked long with him on the thoughts which had visited me. But to what purpose? There was nothing that he could have suggested. Like others in desperate straits, our business was

to wait and hope and help ourselves as best we could. I took a peep at Laura before lying down; she lay motionless, sound asleep, breathing regularly. Lady Monson stirred as I was in the act of withdrawing, and laughed low and so oddly that I knew it was a dreamer's mirth.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE GALLEON'S HOLD.

I WOKE from a deep sleep, and opened my eyes against the glare of the risen sun. Death must be like such sleep as that, thought I. I sat up and met Laura's gaze fixed upon me. She was seated on a seaman's chest lightly smoothing her hair, and the jewels on her fingers sparkled like dewdrops on the golden fall of her tresses. She looked the better for the night's rest, her complexion fresher, her eyes freed of the delicate haziness that had yesterday somewhat dimmed their rich violet sparkles; the pale greenish shadow under them, too, was gone. A little past her stood Lady Monson gazing seawards under the shelter of her hand. Her shape made a very noble figure of a woman against the blue brilliance of atmosphere betwixt the edge of the spread sail and the forecastle rail; the cap she wore I supposed she had found in her sister's box. Her hair was extraordinarily thick and long and of a lustreless black, and looked a very thunder-cloud

upon her back, as I have before said; it put a wild and almost savage spirit into her beauty, which this slender headgear of lace or whatnot somewhat qualified; in fact, she looked a civilised woman with that cap on, but her cheeks were so white as to be painful to see. The full life of her seemed to have entered her eyes; her breast rose and fell slowly, as if her heart beat with labour; yet, slow as every movement in her was, whether in the turn of her head, the droop of her arm, the lifting of her hand, it was in exquisite correspondence with the suggestion of cold dignity and haughty indifference you seemed to find in her form and carriage.

I had a short chat with Laura, and found she had rested well. The men were off the galleon.

‘They have gone to the wreck, I suppose,’ said I, scarce able to see that way, however, for the blinding dazzle of sunshine that made the leagues of eastern ocean as insupportable to the gaze as the luminary himself.

‘The poor man Johnson is dead!’ she exclaimed.

‘Ah! I feared it. I believed I could hear death in his voice when he spoke in his sleep last night.’

‘Cutbill and Head,’ she continued, for she was now well acquainted with the names of the

men, 'have carried his body to bury in the sea past that slope there.'

I sat silent a little. I had all along secretly expected that the man would die, yet the news that he was dead strangely affected me. It might be because he had been amongst the saved, and it seemed hard and cruel that he should perish after having come off with his life out of a conflict that had destroyed robuster men. Then again there was the loneliness of his death, expiring, perhaps, after vainly struggling to make some whispered wants audible to our sleeping ears or to the nodding figure standing at a distance from him on the look-out.

I sent a look round the sea, compassing the blue line as fully as the blaze would permit. The calm was as dead as it had been throughout the night. In the west the heads of a few clouds of the burning hue of polished brass showed with a stare out of a dimness over the sea there. There was bitter loathing of all this deadness and tranquillity in me as I stepped to the side for a sight of Finn down on the beach. What phantom of chance was there for us unless a breeze blew? Dowling was at work below winding with his auger into the galleon's side. He had made two further holes to starboard, and was now piercing a third.

‘There ain’t anything like the first weight of water in her now, sir,’ he sung out; ‘see how languid these here spurts are as compared to yesterday’s spouting.’

I overhauled the whip that was rove at the end of the derrick, secured the end, and went down hand over hand. My skin felt parched and feverish and thirsty for a dip. ‘I am off for a plunge,’ I called to Laura, who came to the side to look at me as I slipped down. I found Finn exploring amongst the wreckage on the shore; Cutbill and Head were then coming round from the other side of the island, their heads hung and their feet taking the pumice rocks with funeral strides.

‘How are you, Finn?’ I called to him.

‘Thank God, I feel myself again. The pain in my side’s gone, and my breath comes easy. Poor Johnson’s dead.’

‘I know.’

‘Something whilst he was in the water struck agin his heart. But arter all, sir, what does it matter, since a man can die but once, where he takes his header from?’

‘We must suffer nothing to depress us, Finn. Good morning, Cutbill. How are you, Head? A sad job for sunrise to turn you to, men.’

‘Poor Sammy!’ exclaimed Cutbill in a deep

sea growl, full of emotion and a slight lift of his face, smothered in whiskers, to the sky. 'He's been hailed for the last time. He's gone where there's no more tarning out.'

'He's lived hard, worked hard, and died hard,' said Head, bringing his eyes in a squint to my face, 'and it would be hard if he's gone to hell arter all.'

'Stow all sarmons,' cried Finn; 'let's see now if there's anything come ashore worth having.'

I left them wading and searching, and trudging to the other side of the island, stripped, and advanced into the water to the height of my hips, not daring to venture farther, for fear of sharks. The plunge made a new man of me, and when I returned, it was with a good appetite and a hearty disposition to help in any sort of work that might advantage us. The men met with a barrel of pork and another case of potted meats. The water was as pure and bright as glass over the shelving beach, and what lay near to on the fluctuating sulphur-coloured bottom was as plain as though viewed through air. We were thus enabled to rescue much of what in thick water we should never have seen; amongst other matters, three cases of champagne, a case of bottled beer, a small cask of brandy, and one or two other articles which had formed a portion of

the forecastle stores, not to mention many armsful of stuff for making flares with, should a vessel show in the night. Of the cabin provisions we recovered but little, owing to their having been stowed aft for the most part, where the yacht had been literally torn to pieces. The bows of the vessel stood gaunt and bare in the light blue water. I saw poor Finn gazing at the remains until his eyes moistened, and he broke away with a deep sigh and a dreary look at me. I never could have imagined that anything inanimate could have appealed so humanly as that mutilated fragment of a fabric that but a little while before shone as sweet and stately a figure upon the sea as any structure of her size that ever lifted a snow-white spire to the sky.

It was after ten o'clock, as was to be guessed by the sun's height, when we started to break into the interior of the galleon. We had worked hard since sunrise; filled another brace of empty casks, which we had found on the beach, with water out of the holes in the rocks; hoisted these casks aboard along with the other provisions and spirits we had fallen in with; got our breakfast; then with prodigious labour and difficulty had turned the great dead porpoise out of the ship by clapping tackles to it and prizing it up with a small studding-sail boom that

served as a handspike. The main-deck was now as dry as the poop or forecastle. Lady Monson remained seated under the awning. Laura, on the other hand, with a handkerchief tied over her head, reckless of her complexion, wandered like a child about the decks, examining the many gorgeous sea-plants, bending her fair face to an iridescent cluster of shells, gazing with rounded eyes and an expression of charming wonder at some flat, flint-coloured, snake-like creeper as if she believed it lived. The wondrous marine parterre seemed the richer for the presence and movements of the lustrous-haired girl, as a rose appears to glow into darker and finer beauty when lifted to some lovely face.

We resolved to attack the cabin entrance first, but it was hard to tell where the door lay, whether in the front of the poop or of the quarter-deck. There were steps leading from one deck to the other on either hand close against the bulwarks, as you easily guessed by the incline and appearance of the thick moulding of shells upon them. Cutbill was for attacking the quarter-deck front, but Finn agreed with me that the state cabin would lie under the poop, and that the door to it, therefore, would be somewhere in the front of that deck. To this part, then, we carried the tool chest. There were five of us ;

every man seized an implement and to it we fell, scraping, hammering, chipping, prizing. Dowling and Head worked as though they had already caught sight of the glitter of precious metal within. Some of the shelly adhesions were hard as rock, some broke away easily in lumps like bricks from a house that is being demolished; but the thickness was staggering, it was a growth of layer upon layer, and every man had a great mound of splintered or concreted shells at his feet when the front at which we worked was still heavily coated. There seemed a sort of sacrilege in the destruction of so much beauty. Again and again I would pause to admire a shape of exquisite grace, a form of glorious hue, before striking; and then it seemed to me as I toiled, many fancies crowding into my head now that I looked close into this glorious incrustation, that it was impossible this galleon could have been sunk to the depth I had first imagined. Surely no such rainbow-like life as I now witnessed existed in the black and tideless depths, countless fathoms out of reach of the longest and fiercest lance of light the sun could dart. No, she had probably settled down on some hill-top within measurable distance of the surface, on some submarine volcanic eminence where the vitality of the deep was all about her.

We came to woodwork at last, or what had

been wood. It was fossilised timber, and the blows of a hammer rang upon it as though an anvil was struck.

‘Here’s where the door is,’ roared Cutbill.

We saw the line of what was manifestly a doorway showing in a space clear of shells, and in a moment we all fell upon it and presently laid it bare—a little door about five feet high close against the starboard heap of shells which buried the poop ladder there.

‘Don’t smash it if ’ee can help it,’ called out Finn.

But it would not yield to any sort of coaxing short of Cutbill’s thunderous hammer, which he swung with such herculean muscle that after half a dozen blows the door went to pieces and tumbled down with a clatter as of the fragments of iron. It was pitch dark inside, of course, but for that we were prepared. Dowling and Head were for thrusting in at once.

‘Back!’ bawled Finn. ‘What sort of air for breathing d’ye think this is after being bottled up afore your great-grandmothers was born.’

Yet for my part, though I stood close, I tasted nothing foul. The first breath of the black atmosphere came out with a wintry edge of ice, and the chill of it went sifting into the sultry daylight of the open air till I saw Laura, who stood

some little distance away watching us, recoil from the contact of it.

‘There’s nothing to be done in there without a light of some kind,’ said I. ‘How was this cabin illuminated? From the deck, I presume, as well as by portholes.’

‘Let me go and see, sir,’ said Finn.

The gang of us armed with tools crawled up the line of shells against the door and gained the poop deck. There was a coffin-shaped heap of glittering incrustation close to where the mizzen-mast had probably stood; the form of it indicated a buried skylight. We fell upon it, and after we had chipped and hammered for some quarter of an hour, the mass of it broke away, and went thundering into the cabin below. The sweep of cold air that rose drove us back.

‘Casements of this skylight were blown out, I reckon, when she settled,’ said Finn; ‘stonishing how them shells should have filled up the cavity without anything to settle on.’

‘Weeds and plants stretched themselves across, maybe,’ said I, ‘and made a platform for them.’

We returned to the quarter-deck but waited awhile before entering the cabin, that the atmosphere might have time to sweeten. Thickly as the upper works of the vessel were coated I suspected

that they would be sieve-like in some places from the circumstance of our finding no water in the cabin. I put my head into the door, fetched a breath, and finding nothing noxious in the atmosphere, exclaimed, 'We may enter now with safety, I believe.' The interior lay very clearly revealed. A sunbeam shone through the deck aperture, and the cold, drowned, amazing interior lay bathed in a delicate silver haze of the morning light. I felt a deeper awe as I stood looking about me than any vault in which the dead had been lying for centuries could have inspired. The hue of the walls was that of ashes. It was the ancient living-room of the ship and went the whole width of her, and in length ran from the front of the deck through which we had broken our way to the moulding of the castle-like pink-shaped stern, the planks sloping with a considerable spring or rise. It had been a spacious sea-chamber in its day. There were here and there incrustations in patches of limpet-like shells upon the sides and upper deck ; under foot was a deal of sand with dead weeds, no hint of the vegetation that showed without. There were fragments of wreckage here and there which I took to be the remains of the furniture of the place ; it had mostly washed aft as though the vessel had settled by the stern.

Up in a corner on the port side that lay somewhat darksome on a line with the door were a couple of skeletons with their arms round each other's neck. They seemed to stand erect, but in fact they rested with a slight inclination against the scantling of the cabin front. Some slender remains of apparel clung to the ribs and shoulder bones, and a small scattering of like fragments lay at their feet as though shaken to the deck with the jarring of the fabric by the volcanic stroke that had uphove her.

'Hearts my life,' murmured Finn. 'What a hobject to come across! Why, they've been *men*!'

'A man and a woman more like,' said Cutbill, 'a-taking a last farewell as the ship goes down.'

'May I come in, Charles?' exclaimed Laura, putting her head into the door.

She advanced as she spoke, but her eye instantly caught the embracing skeletons. She stopped dead and recoiled, and stood staring as if fascinated.

'Not the fittest sight in the world for you, Laura,' said I, taking her hand to lead her forth.

'They were living beings once, Charles!' she exclaimed, drawing a deep breath, and slightly resisting my gentle drawing of her to the door.

'Ay, red hearts beat in them, passions thrilled through them, and love would still seem with

them. What were they? Husband and wife—father and daughter—or sweethearts going to their grave in an embrace?’

She shuddered and continued to gaze. Ah, my God! the irony of those skeletons’ posture,—the grin of each skull as though in mirthless derision of the endearing, caressing grasp of the long and stirless arms!

‘Oh, Charles!’ exclaimed Laura in a whisper of awe and grief, ‘is love no more than *that*?’

‘Yes, love is more than that,’ I answered softly, conducting her, now no longer reluctant, to the door; ‘there is a noble saying, Where we are death is not; where death is we are not. Death is yonder and so love is not. But *that* love lives, horrible as the symbol of it is—it lives, let us believe! and where it is death is not. Would Lady Monson like to view this sight?’

‘It is a moral to break her heart,’ she answered; ‘she would not come.’

She went towards her sister thoughtfully.

‘There’s nothing here, men,’ said I, returning.

‘Them poor covies ’ll frighten the ladies,’ said Dowling, eyeing the skeletons with his head on one side; ‘better turn ’em out of this.’

‘Let them rest,’ said I. ‘The ladies will not choose this cabin now to lie in.’

‘If them bones which are a-hugging one another

so fondly to-day could talk,' said Cutbill, 'what a yarn they'd spin!'

'Pooh,' said I, 'I've had enough of this cabin,' and with that I walked right out.

The men followed. It was broiling hot, the sea a vast white gleam tremorlessly circling the island and steeping like quicksilver into the leagues of faint sky; the bronzed brows of the clouds in the west still burned, looming bigger. I prayed heaven there might be wind there. Laura had told her sister of our discovery in the cabin, and when, whilst we sat making a bit of a midday meal, my sweet girl in a musing, tender way talked of this shipwreck of a century and a half old as though she would presently speak of that cabin memorial of it so ghastly and yet so touching, Lady Monson imperiously silenced her.

'Our position is one of horror!' she exclaimed; 'do not aggravate it.'

The men, defying the heat, went to work when they had done eating, to search for the main hatch that they might explore the hold. I observed that Finn laboured with vigour. In short the four of them had convinced themselves that there was grand purchase to come at inside this ancient galleon, and they thirsted for a view of the contents of her. I was without their power of sustained labour, was enfeebled by the tingling and

roasting of the atmosphere ; my sight was pained, too, by the fierce glare on the unsheltered decks ; so I plainly told them that I could help them no more for the present, and with that threw myself down on the sail beside the chest on which Laura was seated, and talked with her and sometimes with Lady Monson, though the latter's manner continued as uninviting as can well be imagined.

However, some hope was excited in me by the spectacle of the slowly growing brass-bright brows of cloud in the west. There was a look of thunder in the rounds of their massive folds, and in any case they promised some sort of change of weather, whilst they soothed the eye by the break they made in the dizzy, winding horizon, and the bald and dazzling stare of the wide heavens brimming with light which seemed rather to rise from the white metallic mirror of the breathless sea than to gush from the sun that hung almost directly over our heads.

It took the men three hours to find and clear the hatch, and then uproot it. The square of it then lay dark in the deck, and Laura and I went to peer down into it along with the others who leant over it with pale or purple faces. The daylight shone full down and disclosed what at the first glance seemed no more to me than masses

of rugged, capriciously heaped piles of shells, with the black gleam of water between, and much delicate festooning of seaweed drooping from the upper deck and from the side, suggesting a sort of gorgeous arras with the intermingling of red and green and grey. One could not see far fore or aft owing to the intervention of the edges of the hatch, but what little of the interior was visible discovered a vegetable growth as astonishing as that which glorified the decks; huge fans, plants exactly resembling the human hand, as though some Titan had fallen prone with lifted arms, bunches of crimson fibre, with other plants indescribable in shape and colour, of a prodigious variety, though the growths were mainly from the ceiling, or upon the bends where the sides of the galleon rounded to her keel.

‘All them heaps ’ll signify cargo,’ said Dowling.

‘No doubt,’ said I; ‘but how is it to be got at?’

‘Mr. Monson, sir,’ exclaimed Finn, ‘you’re a scholar, and will know more about the likes of such craft as this than us plain sailor men. What does your honour think? Was this vessel a plate ship?’

‘I wish I could tell you all you want to know,’ I replied. ‘She was unquestionably a galleon in her day, and a great vessel as tonnage

then went—seven hundred tons; what d'ye think, Finn?'

'Every ounce of it, sir. Look at her beam.'

'Well, here is a ship that was bound to or from some South American port. She's too far afield for considerations of the Spanish Main and the towns of the Panama coast. Was treasure carried to or from the cities of the eastern American seaboard? I cannot say. But if she was from round the Horn—which I don't think likely, for the Manilla galleons clung to the Pacific, and transhipments came to old Spain by way of the Cape—then I should say there may be treasure aboard of her.'

'Well, I'm going to overhaul her, if I'm here for a twelvemonth,' cried Dowling.

'So says I,' exclaimed Head.

'Would she float, I wonder,' said Cutbill, 'when the water's gone out of her?'

'I'll offer no opinion on that,' said I, laughing. 'I hope I may not be on board should it come to a trial.'

'If she was full up with cargo it must have wasted a vast,' remarked Head.

'Where did these here Spaniards keep their bullion?' exclaimed Finn, stroking down his long cheekbones.

'Why down aft under the capt'n's cabin. They

was leary old chaps ; they wouldn't stow it forrads or amidships,' exclaimed Cutbill.

'All the water will have run out of her by to-morrow morning, I allow,' said Finn ; 'but there's no sarching of her with it up over a man's head.'

'I wish this deck were sheltered,' said Laura. 'What a glorious scene ! I could look at it for hours. But the sun pains me.'

I took her hand, and we returned together to the shadow of the sail spread over the forecastle, leaving the four men talking and arguing and staring down, dodging with their heads to send greedy looks into the gloom past the hatch. But there was nothing to be done till the ship was clear of water, as Finn had said, and presently they came forward and lighted their pipes, seating themselves at a respectful distance from us, but all their talk ran upon the treasure they were likely to meet with, and though I would sometimes catch a half-look from Finn, as though my presence somewhat subdued him, yet I saw that at heart he was as hot and as full of expectation as the others.

The clouds had risen a third of the way to the zenith, when the sun struck his fiery orb into them and disappeared, turning them as black as thunder against the heaven of blood-red light that

lingered long in waving folds as though the atmosphere were incandescent. Then the lightning showed in zigzag lines of sparkling violet, though all remained hushed whilst the sea went spreading in a sheet of glass that melted out of its crimson dye into a whitish blue in the clear east.

‘Should it come on to blow,’ said I to Laura, ‘this sail over our heads will yield us no shelter. We shall have to betake ourselves to the cabin.’

‘With two skeletons in it,’ said Lady Monson sarcastically.

‘We shall not see them,’ I answered, ‘and skeletons cannot hurt us.’

‘We shall see them by the lightning,’ exclaimed Laura, ‘and they will be very dreadful!’

‘I would rather remain in the storm,’ said Lady Monson.

‘But if those figures are carried out of the cabin,’ said I, ‘you will not object to take shelter in it.’

‘I would rather die,’ she said, ‘than enter that part of this horrid ship.’

‘Well,’ said I, mildly, ‘we will first see what is going to happen.’

At half-past five or thereabouts we got what the sailors would have called our supper. There was indeed plenty to eat, enough to last us some week, with husbandry. All the casked meat, it

is true, was uncooked, but enough galley utensils had come ashore—a big kettle, I remember, and a couple of saucepans—to enable us to boil our pork and beef, when our stock of preserved food should be exhausted. Our supply of water, however, justified uneasiness. One's thirst was incessant under skies of brass, and on an island whose crust was as hot as the shell of a newly-boiled egg. But then, to be sure, the surface was honey-combed with wells. In a very short time the salt water would have dried out of the deepest of them, and we might hope that the next thunder shower would yield us drink enough to last out this intolerable imprisonment.

But when was it to end? I stood up to take a view of the sea, the galleon's forecastle probably showed a height of between thirty and forty feet above the water-line, and one seemed to command a wide prospect of ocean; but not a gleam of the size of a tip of feather met the eye the whole wide stagnant sweep around. The sun was now low in the heart of the dark masses of vapour in the west, a sickly purple shadow underhung the clouds upon the sea and glanced back with an eye of fire to every lightning dart that flashed from above. Overhead the sky had fainted into a sickly hectic, and it was an ugly sallow sort of

green down in the east, with a large star there trembling mistily.

‘It’s coming on a black thundering night,’ I heard Cutbill say as he stood up to send a look into the west, with the inverted bowl of a sooty pipe showing past his whisker and a large sweat-drop glancing like a jewel at the end of his nose.

‘There’ll be wind there,’ exclaimed Finn.

‘What signs do you find to read?’ said I.

‘Well, your honour, there’s a haze of rain if ye look at the foot of that smother down there,’ he answered, pointing with the sharp of his hand, ‘and the verse concerning manifestations of that sort is gospel truth! *When the rain before the wind, Then your tops’l halliards mind.*’

‘If it’s coming on a breeze of wind,’ said Dowling, who like the others felt himself privileged by stress of shipwreck to join freely in any conversation that was going forward, ‘this here sail ’ll blow away and we shall lose it,’ meaning the jib that we had stretched as an awning.

‘Pity to lose it,’ exclaimed Finn; ‘shall we take it in, sir, whilst there’s light?’

‘No,’ cried Lady Monson, who probably imagined that if this shelter went she would be driven to the cabin.

Finn knuckled his forehead to her.

‘I’m afraid, Lady Monson,’ said I, ‘that this

sail will be carried away by the first puff, and it will be carried into the sea.'

'If you remove it you leave us without shelter,' she answered.

'But we shall be without shelter if the wind removes it,' said I.

'Then it cannot be helped,' she exclaimed, looking at me as though she found me irritating.

'We shall have to carry this sail aft anyway,' said I, pointing to the one that was spread upon the forecastle. 'The first gust of wet will soak it through, and we shall not be able to use it until it is dry for fear of rheumatic fever.'

'To what part do you wish it carried?' said Laura.

'To the only sheltered spot the ship supplies, the cabin,' I answered.

'You do not intend that we should sleep there, Charles?' she cried.

'We needn't sleep, my dearest, we can keep wide awake. But will it not be madness to expose one's self to a violent storm merely because——'

'Oh, horror!' interrupted Lady Monson; 'I shall remain here though the clouds rain burning sulphur.'

'Finn,' said I, 'when you have smoked your pipe out, fall to with the others, will you, to get

this sail into the cabin, and turn the two silent figures there out of it?'

'Where are they to go, sir?'

'Oh, lower them into the hold for to-night. Lady Monson, is your mattress to be left here?'

'Certainly,' she answered indignantly; 'how am I to rest without a mattress?'

'Only one mattress, then, is to be carried aft, Finn,' said I. 'Now bear a hand like good sailor-men whilst there's daylight. We shall have that blackness yonder bursting down upon us in a squall, then it will be thick as pitch, with decks like a surface of trawlers' nets to wade through, and yonder main hatch at hand grinning like a man-trap.'

'Come, lads,' cried Finn.

The four of them sprang to their feet, rolled up the sail and hauled it aft, singing out a ship-board chorus as they dragged. When they had got it into the cabin, they cut off a big stretch of it which they spread over the open skylight, and secured by weighting the corners heavily with the masses of shell which had been chipped away to come at the aperture. Then Head arrived for Laura's mattress, flung it over his back and staggered with it, grinning, along to the quarter-deck. Lady Monson looked on, cold, white, but with anger brilliant in her great black eyes.

‘I believed that these men were still my servants to command,’ she exclaimed.

‘I am sure they will obey any order your ladyship may give them,’ said I.

‘They have no right to denude this part of the deck since it is my intention to remain here,’ she exclaimed, drawing her fine figure haughtily erect and surveying me with dislike and temper.

‘Henrietta, dear,’ broke in the soft voice of Laura, ‘Mr. Monson instructs them in the interests of us all. See how bright the lightning is. You will not be able to remain here. How frightful was the rain when the “Bride” was wrecked!’

‘The strongest man had to turn his back to the wind,’ said I.

Lady Monson, whose eyes had glanced aft at that moment, jumped from the chest on which she was seated and went in a headlong way to the bulwark as though she meant to leap overboard. I could not understand this sudden wild disorder in her till I saw Cutbill, Dowling, and Head with Finn superintending the business, bearing the pair of embracing skeletons to the main hatch. Laura started and looked away; but there was no absurd demonstration of horror in her. A ghastly sight, indeed, the skeleton twain made, dreadfuller objects to behold in the

wild, flushed, stormy light of the moment than they had appeared in their twilighted corner of the cabin. The long bones of arms clung like magnets to the skeleton necks fossilised, I suppose, by the action of the sea into that posture; and thus grimly embracing, whilst they looked with death's dreadful grin over each other's shoulder, they were lowered by the sailors down the main hatch.

‘Mr. Monson, sir,’ suddenly bawled Finn, ‘will you and the ladies step this way and see the beautifullest sight mortal eyes ever beheld?’

‘Where is it, Finn?’ I called back to him.

‘In the hold, sir,’ he answered.

‘He cannot mean the skeletons,’ exclaimed Laura.

‘Will you come, Lady Monson?’ I exclaimed.

‘Certainly not,’ she replied from the bulwark, where she stood staring seawards and answering without turning her head.

Laura seemed a little reluctant. ‘Come, my love,’ I whispered; ‘is not a beautiful sight, even according to Finn’s theory of beauty, worth seeing?’

I took her hand and together we proceeded to the open hatch.

On peeping down, my first instinctive movement was one of recoil. I protest I believed the

interior of the hull to be on fire. The whole scene was lighted up by crawling fluctuations, creepings and blinkings of vivid phosphoric flame. It might be that the atmosphere of this storm-laden evening was heavily charged with electricity ; yet since the gloom had drawn down I had often cast my eyes upon the sea in the direction where the shadow of the tempest lay and where the water brimmed darkly to the slope of the beach, and therefore had the ocean been phosphorescent even to a small extent I should have observed it ; yet no further signs of fire were apparent than a thin dim edging of wire-drawn, greenish light, flickering on the lip of the brine as it stealthily, almost imperceptibly, crept up and down the declivity of the rock. But in this hold the sparkling was so brilliant that every object the eye rested upon showed even to the most delicate details of its conformation though the hue was uniform (a pale green), so that there was no splendour of tint, nothing but the wonder of a phosphoric revelation, grand, striking, miraculous to my sight, so unimaginable a spectacle was it. It was like, indeed, a glimpse of another world, of a creation absolutely different from all scenes this earth had to submit, as though, in truth, one were taking a peep into some lunar cave rich with stalactites, wondrous with growths

which owed nothing to the sun, all robed with the colour of death—the pale pearl of the moon-beam!

Laura, whose hand grasped my arm, held her breath.

‘Did ever man see the like of such a thing afore?’ exclaimed Finn in an awed voice, as though amazement were of slow growth in him.

Immediately on a line with the hatch, resting on a heap of shells whose summit rose to within an easy jump, lay the two skeletons in that embrace of theirs which was so full of horror, of pathos, of suggestion of anguish. Ah, Heaven, what a light to view them in! And yet they communicated an inexpressibly impressive element of unreality to the picture. It was as though the hand of some sorcerer had lifted a corner of the black curtain of the future and enabled you to catch a glimpse of the secret principality of the King of Terrors.

‘One sees so little of this marvel here,’ exclaimed Laura. ‘How magnificent must be the scene viewed from the depths there!’

‘Have you courage to descend?’ said I.

She was silent a moment, eyeing askant with averted face the two skeletons immediately beneath, then fetching an eager breath of resolu-

tion, she said, 'Yes, I have courage to go—with you.'

'Finn,' I exclaimed, 'this is too grand and incomparable a spectacle to witness only in part. If we are to come off with our lives in this galleon, there,' said I, pointing into the hold, 'is the chance of a memory that I should bitterly reproach myself for not grasping and making the most of. Can you lower Miss Laura and myself into that hold on to that dry, smooth heap there, clear of where those figures lie?'

'Why, yes, your honour, easy as lighting a pipe. William, fetch the chair, will 'ee, and overhaul the whip, and bring 'em along.'

The chair was procured, a turn taken round the stump of the mainmast. I seated myself and was lowered, then down sank Laura and I lifted her out, and a moment after the four seamen sprang from the edge of the hatch. Now indeed we could behold the glowing interior as it deserved to be seen. The galleon was apparently bulk-headed from her fore-castle deck down to the keelson, and the fore-hold, accessible doubtless by a hatch in the lower fore-castle deck, was hidden from us. But aft the vault-like interior stretched in view to plumb with the poop deck, past which nothing of the after hold was to be seen; but the vessel's great beam and such length of her as we

commanded, submitted a large area of illuminated wonders, and as you stood gazing around it made you feel as if you were under the sea, as if you had penetrated to the silent lighted hall of a dumb ocean-god that was eyeing you, for all you knew, from some ambush of glittering green growth whither he had fled on your approach.

The irradiation was phosphoric, I was sure, by the hue and character of it, but how kindled I could not imagine: the water had sunk low; in the death-like stillness you could hear through the hatchway the sounds of it gushing on to the rocks from the perforations. It lay black with gleams of green fire upon it, deep down amid the billowy sheathing of shell under which we might be sure was secreted such of the cargo as had not been washed out of the vessel. Pendent from the upper deck was a very forest of multitudinous vegetation; the sides, far as the eye could pierce, were thickly covered; the writhings of the grave-like glow quickened the snake-shaped plants, the bulbous forms, the distended fingers as of gigantic hands, green outlines which the imagination easily wrought into the aspect of the heads of men and beasts and such wild sights as one traces in clouds; these writhings vitalised all such sights into an aspect of growing and increasing life; they seemed

to stir uneasily, to mop and mow, to elongate and shrink.

‘It’s almost worth being cast away,’ cried Cutbill, ‘to see such a picter as this. Lord, now for a steamer to tow her into port ! My precious eyes ! what a fortune as a mere sightseeing job !’

‘If there’s treasure aboard there’s where it’ll lie stowed,’ cried Dowling, pointing aft ; his figure with his long outstretched arm looking like a drawing in phosphorus. Indeed, in that astonishing light we all had a most unhuman, unearthly appearance. Laura’s hair and skin were blended indistinguishably into a faint greenish outline in the midst of which her violet eyes glowed black as her sister’s by lamplight. Suddenly I felt her hand tremble upon my arm.

‘I feel a little faint,’ she said softly, ‘the atmosphere here is oppressive—and then those——’ She averted her eyes in a shuddering way from the skeletons.

As she spoke the hatch was flashed into a dazzling blaze of sunbright light.

‘Quick, lads,’ I cried, ‘or the storm will be on us ! Hark, how near the thunder rattles !’

The detonation boomed through the hollow hold as though a broadside had been fired within half a mile of us by a line-of-battle ship.

‘There’s her ladyship a-singing out,’ exclaimed

Finn; and sure enough we heard Lady Monson violently calling for her sister.

‘Heaven preserve us! I hope she hain’t been hurt by that flash,’ shouted Cutbill.

‘Up with us, now lads, before it is upon us!’ I cried.

Dowling, seizing the two ends of the whip, went up hand after hand, and in a few moments we were all on deck.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE SECOND NIGHT.

THE dim hectic that was lingering in the atmosphere when we entered the hold was now gone; the evening had fallen on a sudden as dark as midnight: it was all as black as factory smoke away west and overhead, but a star still shone weak as a glow-worm in the east. A second flash of lightning, but this time afar glanced out the figure of Lady Monson standing on the forecastle and calling to Laura.

‘She is not hurt!’ I exclaimed.

‘I am coming, Henrietta,’ said Laura.

‘I shall die if I am left alone here!’ cried Lady Monson. ‘I believed that that flash just now had struck me blind.’

‘Keep hold of my arm, Laura,’ said I, ‘and walk as if the deck were filled with snakes.’

We cautiously stepped the wild growths of the planks, rendered as dangerous as the holes outside of the rocks by the dusk, and approached Lady Monson.

‘May I conduct you to the cabin?’ said I.

‘I would rather remain here,’ she answered; but there was no longer the old note of imperious determination in her voice. In fact it was easy to see that she did not care to be alone when the lightning was fierce and when a heavy storm of wet and wind was threatened.

‘Shall we take in this here sail, sir?’ cried Finn from the other side of the deck, ‘before it’s blown away?’

‘No; keep all fast, Finn,’ said I; ‘her ladyship desires to remain here.’

‘Are you going to stop with me, Laura?’ said Lady Monson.

‘Suffer me to answer for Miss Jennings,’ I exclaimed. ‘I make myself answerable for her health and comfort. I could not endure that she should be exposed when there is a safe and dry shelter within a biscuit-toss of us.’

Just then was a blinding leap of lightning; the electric spark seemed to flash sheer from the western confines to the eastern star, scoring the black firmament with a line of fire that was like the splitting of it. A mighty blast of thunder followed.

‘Hark!’ I cried, as the echoes of it went roaring and rolling into the distance. My ear had caught a rushing and hissing noise, and look-

ing into the direction of the sea, over which the thick of the tempest was hanging, I saw what seemed a line of light approaching us.

‘Rain!’ I shouted, ‘flashing the phosphorescent water up into flame.’

‘No, sir, no!’ roared Cutbill; ‘it’s wind, sir, wind! ’Tis the boiling of the water that looks like fire.’

He was right. An instant’s listening enabled me to catch the yell of the squall sounding in the distance like a moaning sort of whistling through the seething of the ploughed and lacerated waters.

‘Laura, give me your hand,’ I cried. ‘Lady Monson, if you are coming——’

‘I will accompany you,’ she answered, and very nimbly, and much to my astonishment, she slipped her hand under my arm and clung to me. So! There was yet a little of the true woman remaining in her, and it would necessarily discover itself soonest in moments of terror.

The illuminated square of hatchway not only enabled us to avoid the ugly gap down which it was mighty easy to plump by mistake in the confusion of the blackness and in the bewilderment following upon the blinding playing of the lightning; it threw out a faint haze of light that went sifting into a considerable area over the main-

deck, so that we were able to make haste without risk ; and after a few minutes of floundering with an interval of groping when we came to the incline of shells which conducted to the quarter-deck, I succeeded in lodging the two ladies fairly in the shelter of the cabin, and not a moment too soon. We were scarce entered when a squall of terrific violence burst upon the little island. It took the galleon with a glare of lightning of noontide brilliance, a roar of thunder, and such a hurricane howling of wind that no tornado ever shrieked under the heavens more deafeningly. One by one the men arrived. The lightning was so continuous that I could see their figures stealing along the deck, and they made for the cabin door by it as directly as though guided by a stretched hand-line.

‘Did you get in the sail?’ I cried to Finn.

‘Lord love ’ee, sir,’ he roared, ‘it fled to the first blast like a puff of baccy smoke.’

‘Hark to the sea a-getting up!’ said Dowling. ‘Here’s a breeze to start this old waggin. Stand by for a slide, says I. I wish them holes was plugged.’

‘Belay you old owl,’ grumbled Cutbill hoarsely; ‘ain’t there blue lights enough here without you hanging of more out? There’ll be

no sliding with this here hulk onless it's to the bottom when it's time for her to go.'

Nevertheless the sea had risen as if by magic. The swift heaping up of it was the stranger because there had been no preceding swell. The first of the squall had swept over a sheet of water polished as any mirror without a heave, as might have been seen by a glance at the island beach, where the edge of the ocean was scarce breathing. *Now* the shrilling and screaming of the wind was filled with the noise of ploughed and coiling surges dissolving in masses upon the rocks from which they recoiled with a horrible hissing and ringing sound. The continual electric play filled the cabin with light as it glittered upon the sail over the skylight above, or coloured the black square of the door with violet and green and golden brilliance. It was true tropic lightning, a heaven of racing flames, and the thunder a continuous roll, one burst following another till the explosions seemed blent into a uniform roar.

Lady Monson had seated herself on Laura's mattress. My dear girl and I reposed upon a roll of the sail; the men had flung themselves down, one leaning his head upon his elbow, another Lascar fashion, a third sitting upright with his arms folded. There were no wonders in this cabin as in the hold, no marvellous and beautiful

conformations, self-luminous as one might say and making a greenish moonlight radiance of their own. Yet the interior seemed the wilder to the imagination for its very nakedness, for the austere desolation of it as it glanced out to the levin brand to its castle-shaped confines. It forced fancy to do its own work, to revitalise it with the ghostly shapes of beings that in life had filled it, to regarnish it with the feudal furniture of its age. I was heartily thankful that the two skeletons had been turned out. By every flash I could see Lady Monson's black eyes roaming wildly, and though I might have counted upon Laura's spirit whilst I was by her side and held her hand, I could have reckoned with equal assurance upon some wretched distracting display in her sister, had the two embracing skeletons remained in yonder corner to serve as a moral for the motive of this voyage, to be witnessed by the illumination of the lightning, and to add a horror of their own to the sound of the thunder, to the fierce crying of the wind, and to the boiling of the beating seas.

‘I say, Finn,’ I shouted to him, ‘here’s the wind before the rain, my friend—you were mistaken.’

‘My sight ain’t what it was, sir,’ he answered.

‘It’s a commotion to blow something along in sight of us,’ said Cutbill.

‘Wonder if that there hold’s lighted up every night like that?’ said Head; ‘enough to make a man think that there must be sperrits aboard who trims their invisible lamps when it comes on dark.’

‘Sorry I ain’t got my green spectacles with me,’ said Cutbill; ‘if you was to put them on, mate, you’d see them sperrits dancing.’

‘Proper sort of ball-room, though, ain’t it, miss?’ exclaimed Finn, addressing Laura.

‘How touching,’ said Dowling, who I could see by the lightning pulling out his whiskers as if trimming himself, ‘for them skellingtons to go on a-loving of one another for all these years! Supposing they was husband and wife: then if they was living they’d ha’ given up clinging to each other a long time ago.’

Cutbill hove a curse at him under his breath, but the man did not seem to hear.

‘It’s curious,’ continued this sea philosopher in a salt thick voice that seemed not a little appropriate to the strong fish-like, marine, *drowned* smell of this interior, ‘should go on a-showing of affection which they’d sicken at if they was coated with flesh.’

‘Pray hold your tongue!’ said Lady Monson. ‘Captain Finn, please request that sailor to be silent.’

‘Told ’ee so,’ I heard Cutbill growl; ‘always a sticking of that hoof of yourn into the wrong biling.’

Scarce had this been muttered when all on a sudden the squall ceased; there fell a black, dead calm; no more lightning played, not a murmur of thunder sounded; there was nothing to be heard but the roar of the near surf upon the beach and the creaming of seas off the huge area of the angry waters. In its way this sudden cessation, this abrupt, this instant hush on high was more terrifying than the wildest outbreak of tempest. The lightning had been so continuous that in a manner we had grown used to it and we had been able to see one another’s faces by it whilst we conversed as though by some lamp that waned and then waxed brilliant to its revolutions. Now we sat plunged in impenetrable blackness, whilst we sat hearkening, to use an Irishism, to the incredible silence of the atmosphere. Not the faintest loom of the galleon could be distinguished through the open door; yet the sheen of the mystic illumination in her hold hovered like a faint green mist over the hatch and dimly touched a little space of the marine growths round about.

‘What’s agoing to happen now?’ cried Finn; but I did not know that he had left the cabin until

I heard him calling from the outside, 'My eye, your honour, here it comes; a *shower* this time.'

I groped my way out, feeling down with my outstretched hands one of the men who was groping to the door also. The stagnant air was as thick as the fumes of brimstone and oppressively hot. It made one gasp after coming out of the cabin, where it was kept almost cool somehow by the strong weedy and salt-water smell that haunted it. I looked over the rail and saw the sea at the distance of about half a mile away from us, flaming as though it were an ocean of brandy on fire, only that the head of the luminous appearance had as straight a line to the eye as the horizon. But I could now observe how phosphorescent was the sea that, whilst tranquil, had hung a lustreless shadow by marking the vivid flashes of light in the white smother of the froth down in the gloom of the beach and the sharp darting gleams beyond.

I groped back to the cabin, followed by the others, found Laura by the shadow her figure made upon the dim glimmer of the sail, and seated myself beside her. Then plump fell the rain. It was just a sheet of descending water, and spite of the fossilised decks being thickened by marine verdure, the hull echoed to the down-pour with a noise as distracting and deafening as

a goods train passing at full speed close alongside. But the wonder of that rain lay not so much in its weight as in its being electric. It came down black, but it sparkled on striking the decks as though every drop exploded in a blaze. I never witnessed such a sight before, and confess that I was never so frightened by anything in all my life.

‘Why, it’s raining lightning!’ called Head.

‘The vessel will be set on fire!’ cried Lady Monson.

‘Nothen to be afraid of, my lady,’ shouted Cutbill; ‘these fiery falls are common down here. I’ve been rolling up the main-top-garnsail in rain of this sort in the Bay of Bengal when ye’d ha’ thought that the ship had been put together out of lighted brimstone; every rope a streak of flame, and the ocean below as if old Davy Jones was entertaining his friends with a game of snap-dragon.’

It was, no doubt, as Cutbill had said; but then there was not only the sight of the fire flashing out along the length of the vessel as far as the doorway permitted the eye to follow the deck, to the roaring, ebony, perpendicular discharge of the clouds; there was the tremendous thought of our being perched on the head of a newly-formed volcanic rock, that had leapt into existence on such another night as this. Suppose it sank

under us! Here were all necessary conditions of atmosphere, at least, to justify dread of such a thing. Would the ship float? Was she buoyant enough to tear her keel from the rock and outlive the whirlpool or gulf which might follow the descent of a mountain of lava of whose dimensions it was impossible to form a conception? But she had six holes in her, and then, again, there was still plenty of water in the hold, whose volume must already have been further increased—rapidly and greatly increased—by the cataract that fell in a straight line to the broad yawn of the uprooted hatch.

My consternation was, indeed, so great that I could not speak. I felt Laura press my hand, as though the dew in the palm of it and the tremor of my fingers were hints sufficient to her of the sudden desperate fit of nervousness that possessed me; but I could not find my tongue. Figure being out in a horrible thunderstorm, miles from all shelter, and seized by an overmastering apprehension that the next or the next flash will strike you dead! My torment of mind was of this sort. I philosophised to myself in vain. There was nothing in the consideration that others shared my danger—most often a source of wonderful comfort to a person in peril—that I could but die once, that there were harder deaths than

drowning, and the like, to restore me my self-possession. I was unnerved and in a panic of terror, fired afresh by the fearful fancy that had entered my brain on the preceding night of this head of rock gaping and letting us down to God knows what depth. All the time I was feeling with a hideous, nervous intensity with feet, fibres, and instincts for any faint premonitory jar or thrill in the hull to announce that this island was getting under way for the bottom again.

I believe that the electric rain had a deal to do with the insufferable distress of my mind at that time, for when it ceased—with the same startling suddenness that had marked the drop of the wind—I rallied as though to a huge bumper of brandy. My hands were wringing wet, yet cold as though lifted from a bucket of water ; the perspiration poured down my face, but my nerves had returned to me.

‘What now is to be the next act of this wild play?’ said I.

‘A breeze of wind, your honour,’ cried Finn out of the black gap of the door ; and sure enough I felt the grateful blowing of air cooled by the wet.

The weight of rain had wonderfully deadened the sea, and the surf that a little while ago broke with passion and fury, now beat the rocks with a

subdued and sulky roaring sound. It had clarified to the westwards somewhat, the dusk was of a thinner and finer sort there with a look of wind in the texture of the darkness; but it continued a black night, with no other relief to the eye than the pale preternatural haze of light in the square of the main hatch and the occasional vivid flash of phosphor out at sea. But the wind swept up rapidly, and within a quarter of an hour of the first of its breezing it was blowing hard upon a whole gale; the old galleon hummed to it as though she had all her rigging aloft. In an incredibly short time the sea was making clean breaches over the island, rendering the blackness hoary with a look of snow squalls as it slung its sheets of thrilling and throbbing and hissing spume high into the dark sweep of the gale. One saw the difference between this sort of weather and the night on which the 'Bride' had struck. Then the heaviest of the surf left a clear space of rock; but there were times now when the smother came boiling to the very bends of the galleon, striking her till you felt her tremble with huge quivering upheavals of froth over and into her; and it was like being at sea to look over the side and witness the white madness of water raging and beating on either hand. Every now and again a prodigious height of steam-like spray

would go yelling up with the sound of a giantess's scream into the flying darkness from some pipe-like conduit in the porous rock. These columns of water were so luminous with fire, so white with the crystalline smoke into which they were converted by the incalculable weight of the sea sweeping into the apertures, that, dark as it was, one saw them instantly and clearly. They soared with hurricane speed in a straight line, then were arched by the gale like a palm ; and if ever the wind brought the falling torrent to our decks the stonified ship stook to the mighty discharge as though the point of land on which she lay were being rent by the force of flame and thunder which created it.

We sat in the cabin in total darkness. It made our condition unspeakably dreadful to be without light. We had tinder-boxes, but there was nothing to set fire to, nothing that would steadily flame and enable us to see ; nor was there any prospect now of our being able to make a flare should we catch a glimpse of a ship, for what before would have made a fine bonfire was soaked through. It was up to a man's knees on the main-deck, and the cabin would have been flooded but for the sharp spring or rise of the planks from the poop front to the stern. Such darkness as we sat in was like being blind. There

was nothing to be seen through the door but pale clouds of spray flying through the air. Just the faintest outline of our figures upon the white ground of the sail was visible, but so dim, so indeterminate as to seem but a mere cheat of the fancy. A lamp or a candle would have rendered our condition less intolerable. The men could then have made shift to bring some sherry and provisions from the forecabin; the mere toying with food would have served to kill the time. We could have looked upon one another as we conversed, but the blackness of that interior was so profound that it weighed down upon us like the very spirit of dumbness itself. I have often since wondered whether men who are trapped in the bottom of a mine and lie waiting in the blackness there for deliverance—I have often wondered, I say, how long such poor fellows continue to talk to one another. The intervals of silence, I am sure, must rapidly grow greater and greater. There is something in intense darkness in a time of peril that seems to eat all the heart and courage out of a man. The voice appears to fall dead in the opacity as a stone vanishes when hurled at snow.

Cutbill and Finn did their best to keep up our hearts. They spoke of the certainty of this wind bringing a ship along with it. What should we

have done without this galleon? they asked; but for the shelter it provided us with we should have been swept like smoke by the seas off the rocks. There was no fear, they said, of the old hooker not holding together. She was bound into one piece by the brine that had made a stone of her, and by the coating of shells, and if all ships afloat were as staunch as she was there would be an end of underwriting and drowned sailors would be few.

I helped in such talk and did my best, but our spirits could not continue to make headway against the blackness that was rendered yet more subduing by the uproar without, and by our being unable to imagine from moment to moment what was next to happen.

By-and-bye the men stretched themselves upon the sail and slept. I passed my arm round Laura's waist and brought her head to my shoulder, and after a little her regular breathing let me know that she was asleep. Lady Monson was close to us, but she might have been on the fore-castle for all that I could distinguish of her. Whether she sat or reclined, whether she slumbered or was wide awake throughout, I could not imagine. She never once spoke. At times my head would nod, but as regularly would I start into wakefulness afresh to the heavy fall of a sheet of water splashing into the main-deck, or to some

sudden shock of the blow of a sea either against the galleon's side or upon the near rock. Nobody had suggested keeping a look-out. Indeed, had ships been passing us every five minutes we could have done nothing.

It was probably about two o'clock in the morning when the gale abated. The wind fell swiftly, as it mostly does in those parallels; a star shone in the black square of the door; the pouring and boiling of waters about us ceased, and the sounds of the sea sank away into the distance of the beach. I should have stepped on deck to take a look round but for Laura, who slumbered stirlessly and most reposefully upon my shoulder, supported by my arm, and I had not the heart to disturb the sweet girl by quitting her. Added to this, I could guess by looking through the doorway that it was still too black to see anything spite of the glance of starlight, and even though I should discern some pallid vision of a running ship, there was nothing dry enough to signal her with. So, being dog-tired, I let drop my chin, and was presently in as deep a sleep as the soundest slumberer of them all.

Deep and deathlike indeed must have been my repose, for somehow I was sensible of being stormily shaken even whilst my wits were still locked up in sleep.

‘Why, Mr. Monson, sir,’ roared Finn in my ear, ‘ye ain’t so sleepy, I hope, as not to care to git away. Hallo, I say, hallo!’

‘Father of mercy, what is it now?’ I cried, terrified in my dazed condition by his bull-like voice.

‘Why, sir,’ he answered, ‘there’s a barque just off the island. She’s seen our signals, and ’s slipping close in with hands at the main tops’l brace.’

‘Ha!’ said I, and I sprang to my feet.

Finn rushed out again. I had been the last of the sleepers apparently, and was the only occupant of the cabin. The sun was risen, but, as I might suppose by his light, he had scarce floated yet to three or four times the height of his diameter. The doorway framed a silvery blue heaven, and the wondrous vegetation of the deck sparkled in fifty gorgeous dyes, streaming wet after the night, and every blob of moisture was jewel-coloured by the particular splendour it rested upon. I darted on to the quarter-deck, looked wildly towards the fore-castle, then perceived that my companions had gathered upon the poop. Laura came running to me, heedless of the perilous deck, pointing and speechless, her eyes radiant. There was a long swell washing from the westwards, but to the eastwards of the island

the water ran away smooth like the short wake of a great ship, till the shouldering welter swept to it again: and there where the blue heave was, with the sun's dazzle a little away to the right, was a small barque slightly leaning from the pleasant morning breeze, and sliding slowly but crisply through it with a delicate lift of foam to the ruddy gleam of her sheathing, and her canvas glistening sunwards, bright as the cloths of a pleasure vessel.

'*That's* what we've been awaiting for!' shouted Finn.

I came to a dead halt, looking at the barque with Laura hanging on my arm. There was a fellow in the mainchains swinging a leadline, but it was plain that the weight fell to the full scope without result. Then on a sudden round came the main-topsail yard to us with a flattening in of the cotton white cloths from the folds of the course to the airy film of the tiny sky-sail.

'Forward, Head! forward, Dowling, as if the devil were in chase of 'ee,' bawled Finn, 'and get that whip rove and the chair made fast.'

The men ran to the work. Cutbill was following them.

'No, William,' cried Finn; 'stop where 'ee are a minute. The shipwreck 'tother night ain't left me my old voice. Hist! there's a chap hailing us.'

‘What island’s that, and who are you and what manner of craft is that you’re aboard of?’ came from the rail of the barque’s quarter-deck in a thin, reed-like, but distinctly audible voice.

Cutbill roared back, ‘We’re the surwiwors of the schooner-yacht ‘Bride’ cast away three nights ago. Will you take us off, sir?’

‘How many are there of you?’

‘Seven, including two ladies.’

‘Five, Mr. Cutbill, tell ’em,’ shouted Dowling from the forecastle; ‘me and Head stops here.’

‘Have you a boat?’ came from the barque.

‘No, sir,’ roared Cutbill.

‘I’ll send one. Make ready to come along.’

Lady Monson was the first of us to press forward to the forecastle. The main-deck was ankle-deep, but we splashed through it like a pack of racing children and gained the fore-end of the galleon without misadventure. I was mad with impatience, and all being ready with the whip and chair I plumped Laura most uncere- moniously into the seat, caught hold of the line over her head and down we were lowered. Up then soared the empty chair and out swang her ladyship, who plunged into my arms and came very near to throwing me in her eagerness to leap out before the rocks were within reach of her feet.

‘Now,’ said I, ‘the men can manage for themselves,’ and with that I seized hold of Lady Monson’s hand, grasped Laura by the arm, and away we trudged to the beach off which the barque was lying. I was still so newly awakened from a very stupor of slumber that I moved and thought as though in a dream. Yet my wits were sufficiently collected to enable me to keep a bright look-out for holes. Again and again I secretly heaped curses upon the hindrance of this porous surface, for it forced us into deviations which seemed to make a league of a distance that would have been but a few minutes’ walk on reasonable soil. The energy of our strides forbade speech; we could only breathe, and what little mind this sudden chance of deliverance had left us we had to exclusively devote to the pitfalls.

They had lowered a boat aboard the barque by the time that we arrived at the water’s edge, breathless and the three of us staring with a feverish greediness, a thirsty, frantic desire, I may say, which ocean peril of all earthly dangers paints with most perfection upon the eye. She was a good-sized boat of a whaling pattern, sharp at both ends, pulled by three men who peered continuously over their shoulders as they rowed, and steered by a small man in a blue jacket and a broad-brimmed straw hat. By the time she

was close in the others had joined us. I had heard much heated talk amongst them as they came down from the galleon, springing over the holes and wells, and Finn at once said to me :

‘What d’ee think, your honour? here’s Head and Dowling gone mad! They say there’s bullion to be met with in that hulk up there, and they mean to stop with her till they’ve got it.’

‘Nonsense!’ I exclaimed.

‘By the ’Tarnal, then, Mr. Monson,’ cried Dowling, ‘there’s no leaving with me yet. Here’s a chance that ain’t going to happen more’n once to a sailor man.’

‘Ashore there!’ came from the little chap at the tiller of the boat; ‘what sort of beach have you got for grounding?’

‘Pumice-stone, sir,’ answered Finn.

‘Don’t like it,’ said the little fellow with a shake of his head. ‘Is it steep to?’

‘He ought to be able to see by looking over the side,’ grumbled Finn; then aloud, ‘Slope’s as gradual as the calf of a man’s leg.’

‘Well, then, you won’t mind wading,’ said the little fellow.

‘Cutbill, Finn,’ I cried, ‘carry her ladyship, will you? Dowling or Head, come and lend me a hand to convey Miss Jennings.’

The little fool obliged us to wade waist high

by keeping off, so confoundedly anxious was he to keep his keel clear of the ground. However, we easily got the ladies into the boat; then Cutbill, Finn, and I gripped the gunwale and rolled inboards; but Dowling coolly waded shorewards again to where Head was standing.

‘Aren’t you two men coming?’ cried the little fellow, who afterwards proved to be the second mate of the barque, a doll of a man with bright eyes, diminutive features, red beard, and hands and feet of the size of a boy of ten.

‘No, sir,’ answered Dowling; ‘there’s treasure in that there craft, and my mate and me’s going to stop to overhaul the cargo.’

The three seamen belonging to the boat stared on hearing this, instantly pricking up their ears with sailors’ sympathy and fastening devouring eyes on the galleon.

‘They have no reason to believe there is treasure,’ I cried; ‘it is a mere idle hope on their part. Exhort them to come, sir. They stand to perish if they are left here.’

‘Now, then, don’t keep us waiting, my lads,’ exclaimed the second mate.

‘We mean to stop here,’ responded Head decisively.

‘But have you any provisions?’

‘Enough washed out of the yacht to sarve

our tarn,' answered Dowling; 'but we should be glad of another cask of fresh water.'

'Well, you'll not get that,' answered the second mate; 'our own stock's not over plentiful. Now, once more, are ye coming?'

They shook their heads, and in a careless, reckless manner Head half swung his back upon us.

'Give way,' cried the second mate.

'But it's like helping them to commit suicide, Finn,' I exclaimed.

'They ought to be seized and forced into the boat,' said Lady Monson, looking with a shudder at the galleon.

'They've got a notion there's money in that there hulk,' exclaimed Finn, 'and they'll stick to her till they satisfies themselves one way or the other.'

'Small fear of them not being taken off when they're ready to go,' said the mate, staring hard at Lady Monson and then at Laura; 'that island's a novelty which'll bring every ship that heaves her masthead within sight of it running down to have a look at. Volcanic, eh? And that shell-covered arrangement up there rose along with it?'

'Ay,' said Finn.

'Well,' said the little second mate, 'why

shouldn't she have treasure aboard? She has the look of one of them plate ships you read of.'

'I'd take my chance with them two sailors,' said the fellow who was pulling the bow oar.

'So would I,' said the man next to him.

The stroke gazed yearningly through the hair over his eyes.

The sea of the preceding night had cleared the beach of every vestige of the yacht; all the fragments which had littered the rocks were gone. As we drew out from the island it took in the brilliant sunshine the complexion of marble, and the wondrous old galleon lying on top sparkled delicately with many tints as our point of view was varied by the stroke of the oars. The resolution of the two men vexed and grieved me beyond all expression; but what was to be done? My spirit shrunk to the mere thought of their determination when I reflected upon the damp, dark, ocean-smelling cabin, the luminous hold, the two skeletons, the vegetation and shells, whose novelty, wonder, glory, seemed to carry the structure out of all human sympathy, as though it were the product of a form of existence whose creations were not to be met with under the stars. We drew rapidly to the barque. She was an exceedingly handsome model, painted

green, rigged with a masterly eye to accurate adjustment down to the most trivial detail.

‘What’s her name, sir?’ asked Finn.

‘The “Star of Peace,”’ answered the second mate.

‘Homeward bound, I hope, sir?’ says Cutbill.

‘Ay,’ said the little man, grinning, ‘and long enough about it too. Sixty-one days from Melbourne as it is.’

Finn whistled; Laura looked at the mate on hearing him say that the ship was from Melbourne.

‘Oars!’ A boathook caught the accommodation ladder and we gained the deck. The captain of the barque stood in the gangway to receive us; he was a Scotchman with a slow, kind, thoughtful face, grey hair that showed like wire on end with thickness and stubbornness as he lifted his straw hat to the ladies. His grey, keen, seawardly eye rapidly took stock of us. I briefly related our story.

‘I remember the “Bride,” sir,’ he said. ‘She was owned by Sir Wilfrid Monson, who married Miss Jennings of Melbourne.’

‘This is Lady Monson,’ I said; ‘her sister, too, Miss Jennings.’

‘Indeed!’ he exclaimed, with a sort of slow surprise giving a little animation to his speech.

‘I have the honour of being acquainted with Mr. Jennings. He came on board this vessel three days before we sailed along with a gentleman, Mr. Hanbury’—Laura slightly nodded—‘to whom a portion of the freight belongs. I see the likeness now,’ he added, looking with admiration at Lady Monson.

She glowed crimson, and turned with a haughty step to the rail to conceal her face.

‘I have always heard this world was a small one, captain,’ said I, ‘small enough, thank God, to enable your ship to fall in with that rock there. To what port are you bound?’

‘London, sir. There are a couple of cabins at your service. There are no females aboard,’ looking at Laura and running his eye over her dress with a glance on to Lady Monson; ‘I judge ye were cast away in little more than what you stood up in?’

‘By the way, Laura,’ said I, ‘we ought not to leave your box of odds and ends behind us.’

‘Oh, no; bring off everything,’ exclaimed the captain. ‘I’ll send the boat ashore.’

It was arranged that Finn should fetch the box and make a final effort to persuade the two men to come off. The captain of the barque laughed when I told him of the fellows’ resolution and seemed to make little of it. ‘If they’ve got a

notion there's treasure there, sir,' he exclaimed, 'you'll not move 'em. I know Jack's nature. He'd follow old Nick if he believed he'd take him where there were dollars. Ships enough 'll be coming in sight of that rock. I don't fear for the men's safety.'

'But it is a volcanic creation, captain. It may vanish just as it rose, in a flash.'

'Ha!' cried he, sucking in his breath, 'my word! But I should never have thought of that. Better try and coax those men off,' he exclaimed, walking to the rail and putting his head over and addressing Finn who had entered the boat.

'I'll do my best, sir,' answered Finn and shoved off.

'Now, ladies and gentlemen,' said the captain, returning to us, 'will you step below that we may see how you're to be made comfortable?'

After the galleon the cabin of a smack would have been sheer Paradise. Here was a breezy, plain, substantial, homely interior. The sunshine brilliantly flooded it, the eastern splendour of water rippled in lines of light upon the bulkheads; the hot morning breeze gushed humming through the skylight into it. The captain led us to a couple of berths forward of the state cabin and the first object I witnessed was my face reflected in a looking-glass. Heavens! what a contrast to the Pall

Mall exquisite of a few months before ! Unshaven, sunblackened, unbrushed, unwashed ; my linen dark, my clothes expressing every feature of shipwreck in rents, stains and the like ; I needed but a few further grimy embellishments to have passed to admiration as a back alley sailor. The captain's name was Richardson ; he seemed fascinated by Lady Monson, called for his servant or steward, bade him procure at once every convenience of hot water, towels, hair-brushes and the like ; continued to congratulate himself upon having been the means of delivering the daughters of Mr. Jennings of Melbourne from a situation of distress and peril and so warmed up to the occasion, but slowly as the kettle boils, that I easily saw there was small fear of Laura and her sister not being made as thoroughly comfortable as the accommodation supplied by the barque would permit.

I was too anxious, however, about the fellows on the island to linger below, and went on deck leaving Captain Richardson talking to the ladies, protesting in hearty Scotch accents his anxiety to serve them to the utmost of his ability, questioning the steward about sheets and blankets, bidding him likewise tell the cook to make haste with the breakfast, asking Lady Monson if she drank tea or coffee, and so on and so on. The boat was off the island and Finn ashore, coming down from the

galleon to the beach with Laura's box slung betwixt him and Dowling, whilst Head trudged close behind. Then there was a long talk; I could see Finn pointing to the hulk and then to the barque, flourishing his arms and emphatically nodding at one or the other as he addressed them. Cutbill stood in the gangway looking on.

'I hope the captain will prevail upon them to leave that place,' said I to him.

'He won't, sir,' answered Cutbill; 'and blowed if I don't feel now, Mr. Monson, as if I'd made a mistake in leaving it myself!'

Here the mate of the barque stepped up to me, an immense man, even bigger than Cutbill, in a long white coat with side pockets, so vast that one might have thought that he could have stowed the little second mate away in one of them.

'Do those chaps think that there's plunder to be found aboard that effigy?' he asked in a voice rendered unutterably hoarse and harsh by probably years of roaring out in foul weather, supplemented by rum and the natural gift of a deep note.

'Don't know about plunder, sir,' answered Cutbill, 'but they reckon there may be chests of plate and bullion stowed away aft.'

'Stowed away in their eye!' growled the mate. 'Where did she come from?'

‘The bottom of the sea, sir.’

‘An old galleon,’ said he, cocking his eye at her, ‘and a volcanic burst up,’ he continued. ‘Well, I don’t know if so be she’s a galleon, likely as not those chaps are right. Why they thought nothing in the days she belonged to, in stowing a matter of six or seven millions of dollars in the lazarettes of craft of that kind.’

‘By the Lord, Mr. Monson,’ burst out Cutbill, ‘I must go ashore, sir! I feel I’m adoin’ wrong in being here!’

‘You’ll have to swim then,’ said the mate drily, ‘for that boat is meant for our davits when she comes alongside, and it will then be time to trim sail.’

At that moment I observed Finn shaking the two sailors by the hand. He then entered the boat and made for the barque, whilst Head and Dowling walked slowly up to the galleon and sat down in the shade of her under her counter, whence they continued to watch us.

‘It’s no good, Mr. Monson, sir,’ said Finn, as he came clambering and panting over the side; ‘they call it a gold mine, and there’s no persuading of ’em to leave it.’

‘Up with this boat,’ roared the mate; ‘stand by to round in on those topsail braces.’

The boat soared to her davits, the milk-white

squares of canvas on the main went floating onwards into full bosoms ; the barque, bowing the swell, broke the flashing water into trembling lines ; slowly, almost imperceptibly, that marble looking hump of rock with its glittering centre-piece stole away upon the quarter, its solitude somehow making the ocean look as wide again as it was. Laura came on deck and stood by my side.

‘ Oh, Charles ! ’ she exclaimed, ‘ we have left the poor fellows behind, then ? ’

‘ They refuse to leave. Observe Cuthill,’ said I, pointing to the huge figure of the honest tar as he lay over the rail, his face knotted up with conflicting emotions, whilst his expression was rendered spasmodic by his manner of gnawing upon a quid that stood in his cheek. ‘ He is lamenting the loss of a princely income, and would have returned to the island could he have got a boat. Mark Finn too ; with what a mixture of thirstiness and misgiving does he stare ! ’

‘ The poor creatures are waving to us,’ said Laura.

Instantly throughout the barque there was a general flourishing of arms and Scotch caps and straw hats. We lingered watching them till the island looked to be no more than a small blue cloud floating low upon the water.

‘Poor Wilfrid!’ suddenly exclaimed Laura, and her eyes dimmed with tears.

‘It has been a hard time for you, dear one!’ I exclaimed, ‘but the end of the black chapter is reached, let us believe. See, here comes the captain’s man with a tray of good things. But I must positively shave before I can sit down to breakfast, if there is a razor on board to borrow.’

We walked together to the companion hatch, but even there we lingered a little with our eyes dwelling upon that distant azure film which seemed now to be fainting out as though it were a wreath of sea mist that was being fast devoured by the sun.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CONCLUSION.

OUR passage home was extraordinarily long. It took us seventy-five days to arrive at the English Channel from the latitude of the volcanic island. The captain thought himself under a spell, and swore that he believed his barque was to be made a 'Flying Dutchman' of. Yet she was a clipper keel moulded in exquisite conformity with all theories of swiftness in sailing, and when a fresh and favourable wind blew she ate through it as though with the iron bite of a powerful steamer. But had she spread the canvas of a 'Royal George' over the hull of a racing yacht she could have done nothing in the face of the dead calms and light baffling breezes which held us motionless or sent us sliding southwards for days and days. Scarce had we struck soundings indeed—that is to say, hardly had we entered the mouth of the English Channel, when a whole gale of wind blew down upon us from the eastward, and drove us a

third of the distance across to the shores of the United States.

How bitterly sick I grew of this time I cannot express. I had lost everything that I had brought with me in the wreck of the 'Bride,' and was entirely dependent upon the kindness of the captain and the mates for a supply of the few wants I absolutely required. One lent me a shirt, another a pair of socks, a third a razor and so on, but it was a miserable existence. A few weeks of it I should have found supportable by comparing the life with the horrors we had been delivered from; but as time went on gratitude languished, the sense of contrast lost something of its edge; I abhorred the recollection of the galleon, yet it really seemed as though we had merely exchanged one form of imprisonment for another; as if old ocean indeed were suffering us to amuse ourselves with a dream of escape, as a cat humours a mouse in that way, to drop with a spring upon us ultimately when she had sickened the patience out of our souls.

I need not say that Lady Monson made the worst of everything. She had to share a cabin with her sister, and to that extent, therefore, was associated with her, but her behaviour to Laura, as to me, was cold, haughty, disdainful. She froze herself from head to foot, gave us a wide berth

when on deck, would break away abruptly if one or the other of us endeavoured to engage her in conversation, and was as much alone as she could possibly contrive to be. It is hard to say whether she disliked me more than her sister. Yet I could not but feel sorry for her, heartily as I hated her. What was her future to be? What had life in store for one whose memory was charged as hers was? Laura tried hard to find out what her intentions were, what plans she had formed, but to no purpose. But then it was likely that the woman had not made out any programme for herself.

Both she and my darling were desperately put to it for the want of apparel. Each had but the dress she stood in, for Laura's box had contained little more than under-linen. They had arrived on board the barque without covering for their heads; but this was remedied by the second mate presenting Laura with a new straw hat, and later on we heard through Finn that one of the crew had a new grass hat in his chest which he desired to present to Lady Monson. I see her ladyship now in that sailor's hat over which she tied a long brown veil that had come ashore upon the island in Laura's box. I witness again the fiery gleam of her black eyes penetrating the thin covering. I behold the captain, with his slow Scotch gaze

following her majestic figure as she glides lonely to and fro the deck, seldom daring to address her, and rapidly averting his glance when she chanced to round her face towards him on a sudden. And I see Laura, too, sweet as a poet's fancy I would sometimes think, in the mate's straw hat perched on top of her golden hair, a sailor's half fathom of ribbon floating from it down her back, her violet eyes lovely once more with their old tender glow, and with the smiles which sparkled in them and with the love which deepened their hue as she let me look into them.

She had soon regained her health and spirits. I never would have believed that two women born of the same parents could be so absolutely dissimilar as these sisters. Laura made no trouble of anything. She ate the plain cabin food as though she heartily enjoyed it; cooled me down when I was slowly growing mad over some loathsome pause of calm, made light of the embarrassing slenderness of her wardrobe. She had always one answer: 'This is not the galleon, Charles. We're bound to England. You must be patient, my dear.'

I remember once saying to her, 'Your dress is very shabby, my pet. It no longer sits to your figure as it did. It shows like shipwrecked raiment. Salt water stains are very abundant;

and your elbow cannot be long before it peeps out. How, then, is it that I find you more engaging, more lovely, more adorable in this castaway attire than ever I thought you aboard the 'Bride,' where probably you had a dozen dresses to wear?'

'Mere prejudice,' she answered, laughing and blushing. 'You will outgrow many opinions of this kind.'

'No! But don't you see what a moral shipwreck enables you to point to your sex, Laura?' said I. 'Girls will half ruin their fathers and wives almost beggar their husbands for dress. They clothe themselves for men. No doubt you consider yourself wholly dependent for two-thirds of your charms upon dress. All women think thus—the young and the old, the beautiful and the—others. But what is the truth? You become divine in proportion as you grow ragged!'

'When I am your wife you will not wish that I shall be divine only on the merits of rags,' said she.

'Well, my dear,' said I, 'old ocean has given me one hint concerning you. Should time ever despoil you of a single charm there is the remedy of shipwreck. We will endeavour to get cast away again.'

Thus idly would we talk away the days. No

ship ever before held such a pair of spoonies, I dare swear, spite of the traditions of the East India Company. But sweet as our shipboard intercourse was, our arrival in England threatened delays and difficulties. First of all she declared that she could not dream of marrying without her father's consent. This was, no doubt, as it should be, and surely I could not love her the less for being a good daughter. But the consent of a man who lived in Melbourne, and who had to be addressed from England, signified, in those ambling times, the delay of half upon a year.

‘A year, Laura!’ I cried on one occasion whilst debating this subject; ‘think of it! With the chance, perhaps, of your father’s reply mis-carrying.’

She sighed. ‘Yes, it is a long time. Oh, if Melbourne were only in Europe. Yet it cannot be helped, Charles.’

‘But my heart’s delight!’ I exclaimed, ‘why should not we get married first and then write for your father’s consent?’

No; she must have her papa’s sanction.

‘All right birdie,’ said I; ‘anyhow you will remain in England till you hear from him and so we shall be together.’

– ‘It might shorten the time,’ she said with a little blush and a timid glance at me under the

droop of her eyelids 'if you and I sailed to Melbourne.'

'It would, my precious!' I answered; 'but suppose on your introducing me your father should object?'

'Oh no, Charles! he will not object,' she exclaimed with a confident shake of the head.

'In fact then, Laura,' said I, 'you are sure your papa will sanction our marriage?'

'Quite sure, dear.'

'Then would it not come to the same thing if we got married on our arrival in England.'

This was good logic, but it achieved nothing for me, and since I saw that her father's sanction would contribute to the happiness of her married life, I never again attempted to reason with her on the subject.

At last, one morning we found ourselves in the English Channel, bowling over the green ridges of it before a strong south-westerly wind, and within fifty hours of making the Lizard Light the brave little barque 'Star of Peace' was being warped to her berth in the East India Docks. Down to that very moment, incredible as it may seem, Lady Monson had given neither her sister nor myself the vaguest hint of what she intended to do. As we stood waiting to step ashore she

arrived on deck and approaching Laura, exclaimed :

‘ Mr. Monson, I presume, will escort you to a hotel.’

‘ Won’t you accompany us, Henrietta?’ her sister asked.

‘ No, I choose to be independent. I shall go to such and such a hotel,’ and she named the house at which she had stopped with Colonel Hope-Kennedy when she arrived in London on her way to Southampton. ‘ You can address me there, or call upon me, Laura. I have not yet decided on any steps. In all probability I shall return to Melbourne, but not at present.’

She extended her hand coldly to her sister and gave me a haughty bow. Laura bit her lips to restrain her tears, but her pride was stung ; disgust and amazement too fell cool upon her grief.

The last I ever saw of Lady Monson was as she passed along the quay towards the dockyard gates. As she paced forward, stately, slow, her carriage queenly and easy as though, sumptuously clothed, and in the full pride of her beauty she trod the floor of a ball-room, the scores of sailors, labourers, loafers who thronged the decks turned to a man to stare after her. A strange and striking figure indeed she made, habited in

the dress which she wore when the 'Shark' foundered, and which, as you may suppose, by this time showed very much like the end of a long voyage. The brown veil concealed her features and to a certain degree qualified the outlandish appearance of the sailor's grass hat upon her head.

'So!' said I as she disappeared, 'and now, Laura, it is for you and me to go ashore.'

We bade a cordial farewell to Captain Richardson and his mates and to Finn and Cutbill, both of whom promised to call upon me. I had the address of the owner of the vessel, and told the skipper that next day I would communicate with the office and defray whatever expenses we had put the ship to. I further took the addresses of the captain and his mates that I might send them some token of my gratitude for our deliverance and for the many kindnesses they had done us during the long and tedious passage.

A few hours later I had comfortably lodged Laura in a snug private hotel within an easy walk of my lodgings, to which I forthwith repaired, and took possession of afresh with such an emotion of bewilderment excited in me by the familiar rooms, and by the feeling that I was once more in London, with no more runaway wives to chase, no more Dutchmen to fire into, no more

duels to assist in, no more volcanic rocks to split upon, and no more galleons to sleep in, that I felt like a man just awakened from some wild and vivid dream whose impressions continue so acute that the familiar objects his eyes open upon seem as phantasms that must presently fade. My first act was to send a milliner and a dressmaker to Laura, and to see in other ways to her immediate requirements ; my next to address a letter to Wilfrid's solicitors, in which I acquainted them with the loss of the 'Bride' and the death of my cousin. Whom else to write to at once about the poor fellow I did not know. I asked after his infant, and requested them to tell me if the child was still with the lady with whom my cousin had placed it before leaving England. I added that I should be pleased to see one of the partners and relate the full story of the voyage, the object of which I could not doubt Wilfrid had informed them of before sailing.

I spent the evening with Laura. All our talk was about what she was to do until she had heard from her father, to whom she told me she had written a long letter within an hour after her arrival at the hotel, 'so as to lose no time, Charles.' She had no relations in England ; scarcely an acquaintance for the matter of that ; with whom was she to live then ? Even had Lady Monson

settled down in a house she was not a person with whom I could have desired the girl I was affianced to to be long and intimately associated. The notion of her returning to Australia alone was not to be entertained. There seemed nothing then for it but for me to overhaul the list of my connections, to make experiments in the direction of relations, and endeavour to find a home for her with one or another of them until there should some day arrive a mail from Australia giving me leave to take her to my heart.

Well, it was next morning that I had finished breakfast and was sitting musing over a fire with a newspaper on my knee. My mind was full of the past. I remember looking round me almost incredulously with eyes that still found the familiar furniture of my room unreal and indeed almost impossible, listening with ears that could scarcely accept as actual the transformation of the roar and beat and wash of the seas into the steady hum of ceaseless traffic in the great London roadway into which the street I occupied opened. Years had elapsed it seemed since that night when my servant had ushered in my cousin, and I saw in fancy the wild roll of his eyes round the apartment, the crazy flourish of his hands, his posture as he sank his head upon the table battling with his sobbing breath.

I was disturbed by a smart knock on the door. 'Come in.' The landlord entered: a thin, iron-grey, soft-voiced man who had for many years been butler in an earl's family, and who had retired and started a lodging-house on discovering that he had married a woman of genius in the shape of a cook.

'There's a person below named Muffin would like to see you, sir.'

I stared at him as if he were mad.

'Muffin!' I whispered.

'That was the name he gave, sir,' he exclaimed, astonished by my amazement.

'Muffin!' I repeated, scarce crediting my hearing; 'describe him, Mr. Cork.'

'A clean, yellow-faced man, sir, hair of a coal-blackness, looks down when he speaks, sir, seems a bit shaky in the ankles; a gentleman's servant, I should say, sir.'

'Show him up, Mr. Cork!' I exclaimed, doubting the description as I had the name, so impossible did it seem that this person could be Wilfrid's valet.

In a few moments the door was opened, and in stepped *Muffin*!—the Muffin of the 'Bride,' Muffin the ventriloquist, Muffin the whipped and ducked, and, as I could have solemnly sworn, Muffin the *drowned*! He stood before me with

the old familiar crook of the left knee, holding his hat with both hands against his stomach, his head drooped, his lips twisted into their familiar grin of obsequious apology. His yellow face shone, his hair was as lustrous as the back of a rook; he wore large loose black kid-gloves, and he was attired in a brand new suit of black cloth. I know nothing in the way of shocks severer for the moment that tells more startlingly upon the whole nervous system than the meeting with a man whom one has for months and months believed dead. I was unable to speak for some moments. I shrank back in my chair when he entered, and in that posture eyed him whilst he stood looking downwards, smiling and suggesting in his attitude respectful regret for taking the liberty of intruding.

‘Well,’ said I, fetching a deep breath, ‘and so you are Muffin indeed, eh? Well, well. Why, man, I could have sworn we left you a corpse floating close to a volcanic island near the equator.’

‘So I suppose, sir!’ he exclaimed, ‘but I am thankful to say, sir, that I was not drowned.’

I motioned him to sit; he put his hat under the chair, crossed his legs, and clasped his hands over his knee. A sudden reaction of feeling, supplemented by his strange appearance, produced

a fit of laughter in me. The image of his radish-shaped form, half naked, quivering down the ranks of the seamen, with Cutbill grotesquely appavelled compelling him to keep time, recurred to me.

‘You seem resolved that I shall believe in ghosts, Muffin,’ said I; ‘and pray how came you to learn that I was saved from the wreck, that I had returned to England, was here in these lodgings, in short, where I only arrived yesterday?’

‘Sir Wilfrid received a letter from his solicitors this morning, sir, enclosing your letter to them.’

‘Sir Wilfrid!’ I shouted; ‘is he alive?’

‘Oh yes, sir, and very much better both in body and mind, I’m ’appy to say, sir. He would have called on you himself, sir, but he’s suffering from an attack of gout in his left foot, and has been obliged to keep his bed for two days.’

I jumped from my chair and fell to pacing the room to work off by locomotion something of the amazement that threatened to addle my brains.

‘Wilfrid alive?’ I muttered. ‘What will Laura say to all this? Muffin,’ I cried rounding upon him, ‘what you are telling me is a miracle! a thing beyond all credibility. Why, we saw the yacht go to pieces! nearly the whole mass of her

in fragments came ashore, along with four or five dead bodies. How in heaven's name did Sir Wilfrid escape ?'

He responded by telling me the story. Johnson, the man who had died upon the island was perfectly right in saying that he believed a number of men had rushed to one of the boats shortly after the yacht had struck. I myself remember being felled by a gang of people flying aft in the blackness. Muffin was one of them. The white water over the side enabled them to see what they were about. The boat, a noble structure, of a lifeboat's quality of buoyancy, was successfully lowered, seven men got into her, one of whom was Muffin. The yacht was then fast breaking up. The men, to escape being pounded to pieces by the battering rams of the wreckage hurled on every curl of sea, headed out from the island straining their hearts at the oars ; but they were again and again beaten back. There were but five oars, and Muffin and one of the seamen having nothing to do sat crouching in the stern sheets. Suddenly a figure showed close alongside crying loudly for help, Muffin grasped him by the hair of his head, the other fellow leaned over and between them they dragged the man in. It was my cousin ! By dint of sustained and mad plying of oars they drew the boat clear of the wreckage,

bringing the white line of the thunderous surf on the island beach upon their quarter ; they then gave the stern of the little fabric to the wind and seas and fled forwards like smoke, and when the dawn broke they were miles out of sight of the rock. A day and a night of dead calm followed ; they were without food or water, and their outlook was horrible ; but at sunrise on the third day they spied the gleam of a sail towards which they rowed, and before the darkness fell they were safely on board a large English brig bound to Bristol.

Such was Muffin's story. He said that Sir Wilfrid on being told it was Muffin who had rescued him promised to take him back into his service on reaching England. He added that my cousin had entirely lost the craze that had possessed him concerning his bulk and stature. The yacht on going to pieces had liberated him, and with his sudden and startling enlargement his mad fancy entirely passed away. So that poor old Jacob Crimp came very near the truth when he had suggested to me that my cousin's senses might be recovered by a great fright.

Muffin asked me the names of the others who were saved. I told him who they were.

‘And Mr. Cutbill wasn't drowned, sir?’ said he.

‘No,’ I replied.

‘And Captain Finn is saved too. I’m so glad, sir.’

But the rogue gave me a look that clearly signified he was very sorry indeed.

An hour later I was sitting by my cousin’s bedside. He was stopping at a hotel near Charing Cross. I will say nothing of the warmth of our meeting. The tears were in my eyes as I grasped and retained his hand. He was perfectly rational, had a more sensible look in his face than I had ever witnessed in it, and his memory was as clear as my own. It seemed to me that the shock of shipwreck had worked wonders in him, though to be sure strong traces of congenital weakness were still visible in the quivering eyelids, the occasional, irrelevant, loud laugh, the boyish eagerness of manner, with now and again the passing shadow of a darkening humour. For a long time we seemed able to talk of nothing but the wreck of the ‘Bride’ and of our several experiences. I very delicately and vaguely referred to the delusion that had imprisoned him in his cabin, but his stare of surprise advised me that he had no recollection whatever of his craze, and it was like a warning to me to instantly quit the subject. He told me that Muffin had behaved with a touching devotion to him whilst they were in the boat, pillowing his

head when he slept, cooling his hot brow with water, sheltering him from the heat of the sun by standing behind him with his jacket outstretched to the nature of a little awning. He asked tenderly after Laura, and made many inquiries after the men who had been saved, bidding me tell Finn, should he visit me, to call upon him that he might obtain the names and addresses of the survivors and enable them to replace the effects they had lost by the foundering of the yacht.

‘You do not ask after your wife, Wilfrid,’ said I, a little nervously.

‘Oh, you told me she was saved,’ he answered languidly; then after a pause he added, ‘Where is she?’

‘She refused to accompany her sister,’ said I; ‘she loves independence. She has gone alone to such and such a hotel, where I presume she is still to be found.’

His face flushed to the name of that hotel; he instantly remembered. He bent his eyes downwards and said as if to himself, ‘Yes, she is of those who return to their vomit.’

‘What are your plans?’ said I.

‘As regards Lady Monson, do you mean?’

‘Well, she is still your wife, and what concerns her concerns you, I suppose, more or less.’

‘I shall not meddle with her,’ said he, making

a horrible grimace to an involuntary twitch of his gouty foot ; ‘ she can do what she pleases.’

‘ She talks of returning to Australia.’

‘ Let her go,’ said he.

And this, thought I, is the issue of your wild pursuit of her ! Had he but waited a few months disgust and aversion would have grown strong in him. He would have been guiltless of shedding the blood of a fellow-creature—he would have preserved his noble yacht—but then, to be sure, I should probably never have met Laura !

His eye was upon me while I mused a little in silence.

‘ My solicitors advise proceedings in the Divorce Court,’ said he, ‘ but I say no. I certainly should never try my hand at marriage again, and therefore a divorce would serve no end of my own. But it might answer *her* purpose very well indeed ; it would free her, and I do not intend that she shall have her liberty.’

‘ You will have to maintain her.’

‘ Oh, my solicitors will see to that,’ he answered with a curious smile.

‘ Wilf,’ said I, ‘ she may fall very low, and then when nobody else will have anything more to do with her, she will return to you as your lawful wife, and play the devil with your peace and good name.’

‘I am not going to free her,’ said he snappishly.

‘Do you mean to make any stay in London?’ said I.

‘I am waiting till the gout leaves me,’ he answered, ‘and shall then go abroad. I have been recommended to do so. It is pretty sure to come to the ears of Colonel Hope-Kennedy’s friends that I shot him in a duel. He was a widower and childless, but he has a sister, a Lady Guthrie, who adored the ground he trod on and thought him the noblest creature in the universe. My solicitors advise me not to wait until I am charged with the fellow’s death, and so I am going abroad.

‘Humph,’ said I; ‘and how am I to be dealt with as an accessory?’

‘Pooh!’ he exclaimed, ‘one never hears of seconds being charged.’

‘You will take baby with you, I presume?’

He answered no. During his absence a cousin of his had lost her husband, a colonel in India. She had arrived in England with two grown up daughters, and was so poor that she had asked Wilfrid to help her. He had arranged that she and the girls should occupy his seat in the North and take charge of his child. This in fact had been settled, and Mrs. Conway and her daughters were now installed at Sherburne Abbey. On

hearing this it instantly suggested itself to me that Mrs. Conway would provide Laura with the very home that she needed until we heard from Mr. Jennings. Wilfrid of course acquiesced ; he was delighted ; he loved Laura as a sister, and his little one would be doubly guarded whilst she was with it. So here was a prompt and happy end to what had really threatened to prove a source of perplexity and indeed in some senses a real difficulty.

And now to end this narrative. A fortnight later Wilfrid went abroad to travel, as he said, in Italy and the south of France, and with him proceeded Mr. Muffin. During that fortnight Laura and I were frequently with him, but it was only on the day previous to his departure that he mentioned his wife's name. In a careless voice and off-hand manner he asked if we had heard of her, but neither of us could give him any news. We had not chosen to learn by calling if she continued at the hotel to which she had gone on her arrival. She had not written to her sister, nor had she communicated with Wilfrid's solicitors. However, about a fortnight after I had returned to London from the north, whither I had escorted Laura, there came a letter to my lodgings addressed to my sweetheart. I guessed the handwriting to be Lady Monson's. I forwarded it to Laura, who returned

it to me. It was a cold intimation of her ladyship's intention to sail in such and such a vessel to Melbourne on the Monday following, so that when I read the missive she had been four days on her way. For my part I was heartily glad to know that she was out of England.

Soon after my arrival I sent a description of the volcanic island and the galleon on top of it to a naval publication of the period. It was widely reprinted and excited much attention and brought me many letters. But for that article I believe I should have heard no more of Dowling and Head. It chanced, however, that my account of the island was republished in a West Indian journal, and I think it was about five months after my return to this country that I received a letter from the master of a vessel dated at the Havannas and addressed to me at the office of the journal in which my narrative had been published. This man, it seems, having sighted the rock about three weeks after we had got away from it in the 'Star of Peace,' hauled in close to have a good look at an uncharted spot that was full of the deadliest menace to vessels, and observed signals being made to him from what he was afterwards informed was the hull of a fossilised ship. He sent a boat and brought off two men, who, it is needless to say, were Dowling

and Head. They very frankly related their story, told the master of the vessel how they were survivors of the schooner-yacht 'Bride,' and how they had declined to leave the island because of their expectation of meeting with treasure aboard that strange old ship of weeds and shells. Day after day they had toiled in her, but to no purpose. They broke into the piles of shells, but found nothing save rottenness within, remains of what might have been cargo but of a character utterly indistinguishable. There was not a ha'porth of money or treasure, so there was an end of the poor fellows' princely dreams. They were received on board and worked their passage to Rio, where they left the ship, which then proceeded to the Havannas.

There can be little doubt that shortly after this the volcanic rock subsided and vanished off the surface of the sea, after the usual manner of these desperate creations. The editor of the naval journal received several copies of logs kept by ships which had traversed the part of the ocean where the island had sprung up, and it was gathered after a careful comparison of these memoranda that the rock must have disappeared very shortly after Dowling and Head had been taken off it, for the log-book of a vessel named the 'Martha Robinson' showed that three days

later she had passed over the exact spot where the island had stood and all was clear sea.

My time of waiting for the hand of Laura was not to prove so long as I had feared. Very unexpectedly one morning I received a letter from my darling from the Abbey. Her father had arrived on the preceding day. She could scarcely believe her ears when a servant came to tell her that Mr. Jennings had called and was waiting to see her. Of course he had not received her letter. He had taken it into his head to visit England, both his daughters being there, mainly with the intention of taking Laura back with him when he returned. He was almost broken-hearted, so Laura wrote, when she told him about Lady Monson. However, he was in England, and after waiting a few days so as to give him time to recover the dreadful shock caused him by the news of his daughter's behaviour, I went down to Westmoreland, was introduced to the old gentleman, and found him a bluff, hearty, plain-spoken man. He told me he could settle twenty thousand pounds upon his child, and seemed very well satisfied to hear that I was not without a pretty little income of my own. He approached the subject of insanity with a bluntness that somewhat disconcerted me. I assured him that so far as I could possibly imagine I was not mad, that my

cousin's craziness came from a source which did not concern me in the least degree. He was pleased afterwards to tell Laura that he could see by my eye that my intellect was as sound as a bell; an observation upon which I thought I had some right to compliment myself, for to be suspected of being 'wanting' is often to involuntarily and unconsciously look so, and I must say that whilst Mr. Jennings and I talked about Wilfrid's craziness and where it came from, he regarded me with a keenness that was at times not a little embarrassing.

Laura and I had been married two years when we heard of Lady Monson. Mr. Jennings had returned to Australia, but in one or two letters we had received from him he never mentioned Henrietta's name. Then came a missive in deep mourning. Lady Monson was dead. She had been received into the Roman Catholic Church, so wrote the father in a letter whose every sentence seemed as though he wrote with a pen dipped in his tears. She had, apparently, given up all thoughts of this world and devoted her days and nights to ministering to the poor. One day she returned to her home looking ill; two nights later she was delirious. She broke from the grasp of her attendants and marched with stately step, singing in her rich contralto voice as she went

to an upper chamber that had been Laura's bedroom, where, planting herself before a mirror she fell to brushing her rich and beautiful hair, singing all the while till on a sudden she fell with a shriek to the ground, was carried back to her bed, and two hours later lay a corpse.

THE END.

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